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# William Faulkner as Sociologist: An Adventure in the Sociology of Literature

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WILLIAM FAULKNER AS SOCIOLOGIST:  
AN ADVENTURE IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Katherine Talmage Stuart

July 1970

WILLIAM FAULKNER AS SOCIOLOGIST:  
AN ADVENTURE IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

My basic problem will be not to prove that Faulkner is, was, a sociologist or to suggest that his works be required reading in courses in sociological theory, but rather, to show in what sense and what areas his and the role of sociologist overlap. A thorough reading of the major Faulkner novels, a sorting-out and probing of his passages relevant to the field of sociology seems the most productive way to begin tackling the problem. First the effort will be made to grasp his ideas in context, then to extricate and analyze them out of context. The relationship of Faulkner to trends in contemporary sociology requires a treatment on many levels. We will first need to compare the artistic and sociological techniques. Then we shall want to look at Faulkner's work itself and to consider his use of the sociological perspective. Aspects in the writings of William Faulkner to be given special emphasis are culture and personality, the regionalism, social class and mobility, and occupational structure as reflected in his major literary themes, symbolic constructions and character developments.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recognition is extended to my thesis committee, Dr. Bryant, Dr. Josepsson, and Mr. Taylor, without whose guidance my thesis would almost certainly have taken a different course, especially the conclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

The learned man who is helpless in practical affairs is analogous to the miser, in that he has become absorbed in a means.

Bertrand Russell

Compare: "Maybe we are both father. . . Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the nest pool which the first pool feeds. . . let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different time the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface, too at the original ripple-space to the old ineradicable rhythm."

Absalom, Absalom!, p. 216

And: "As social scientists generally use the term, the 'culture' in which your personality has been shaped consists of all the habitual patterns of behaving, thinking, feeling which are passed down by learning from one generation to another."

Calhoun, et. al., An Introduction to Social Science, p. 8

There are many ways of knowing things and many angles from which sociological phenomena can be viewed. Sociologists are often accused of being too concerned with the particular, the inconsequential, of sacrificing worthwhile epistemological concerns for the convenience of the method.<sup>1</sup> Madges's explanation is that the scientific temperament is more comfortable breaking down a complex phenomenon into simpler parts than in trying to order a series of diverse findings into a unity of relationships.<sup>2</sup>

It is certainly possible for the social scientist to be so absorbed in systematic verification of his data, in the quantitative

process and proving of the superficial as to lose sight of the emotional context of human experience. As put by a friend of Lucas Beauchamp: "A middle year man like your paw and your uncle, they can't listen. They aint got time. They're too busy with facks."<sup>3</sup> We sociologists would do well to listen. There are sources mellow for sociological investigation, most of which were there all along, but to which we have generally been too distracted by the syntax and procedure of our discipline to attend. There are sources for social<sup>4</sup> insight other than the laboratory, the street scene, and census data. The works of William Faulkner provide one such source.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It would be appropriate at this point to define words which will become as building blocks to later discussion. Sociology, we can define as the study of social action (Weber) or social facts (Durkheim) or human interaction (Sorokin). Ralph Thomlinson offers a simple explanatory statement:

The purpose of sociology is to understand people's (and one's own) thoughts and actions by putting them into perspective gained by knowledge of other people and other groups (non-Western societies, different social classes, contrasting families and so forth) and by recognizing the groups of which one is a member and tracing their impact on oneself."<sup>5</sup>

The meaning or non-meaning of the term, the sociology of literature, will be discussed in greater depth under the review of the research. Apparently, the way I am using the concept is totally different from most of the ways it has been used previously, consistent only with the interpretation given by Francis Merrill. In speaking of the sociology of literature or literary sociology, to set it apart from all



the other branches, I am referring to the sociological examination of a work or works of literature as a source for valuable insight into man as a social animal. Accordingly, the sociologist of literature might investigate Babbitt as a potential treatise on social-class mobility or To Kill a Mockingbird for a demonstration of the socialization process in action.

The word, novelist, will be used here in the sense of a conscious creator of a world in which individuals live, move and have their being, a world based on an unconscious internalization of what the author has seen and heard and known. It is the medium therefore by which the roles of sociologist and novelist are cordoned off, the distinction of one from the other.

To look at both types of student of human behavior and determine "when the twain shall meet" is part of the task of this thesis. To show how one particular novelist (chosen more because he is fascinating, controversial, than for any logical reason) can operate in the sociological field and with a success comparable to that of a trained social scientist constitutes the other part. The focus then, will be on the artist as sociologist rather than the sociologist as artist.

The method of this research is of necessity adapted to the nature of the material. The techniques of inquiry will be several and varied. For theoretical analysis I have chosen to construct a parallel design in which representative quotations from the works of Faulkner can be seen in immediate proximity to their equivalent in sociological thought. I shall analyze various characters from the sociological point of view, revealing in this way how culture has brought its influence to bear on personality; here the characters will be treated

as real people. Though my method will surely entail analysis of the content, it cannot be technically described as content analysis. As there will be no effort here to quantify, in the general discussion and comparative design, the bulk, quantity, of sociology in Faulkner's work should be self-evident.

#### AIM

The specific purpose of my study is to elucidate some basic Faulknerian concepts. I plan to demonstrate that this writer became a sociologist by default. What I am really doing, however, is trying to provide the sociology of literature with a "bit of spark" and a new direction in its seminal course of development. In exploring the relationship between science and art, social science and fiction, sociology and the make believe of Faulkner, I am, in effect, participating with others in "cutting new ground" for sociology. The task, I feel, is a worthwhile step toward an enhanced understanding of man and his society and the interdependence of the two. Literature is seen as a sociological contribution of a form different from but no less important than that which is statistically verified. On the surface, my aim is to explore, clarify, implicitly to make a case for a greater balance in the social sciences between the realm of fact and the realm of fiction.

Furthermore, I would like to see sociologists bringing their effect to bear on the other disciplines and on the general public, at least equal to, if not greater than that of the psychologists. Book after book (in the tradition of Freud and Jung) has been written psychoanalyzing prominent characters in fiction, that is, interpreting their actions in a Freudian and neoFreudian light. Hamlet had "an Oedipus complex," the very name of the syndrome coming from an earlier

literary figure. Psychiatrists analyze fictional characters as they would their patients. Sociologists have no patients to analyze (though, apart from the medical training, I see no reason why they would not be as well qualified) but their insights and skills can be easily applied to people with whom we are all familiar from the pages of literature.<sup>6</sup> In a few words, I would like to see the sociological enterprise doing for fiction what psychology has done. This study can be regarded as a stir in that direction.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>As expressed in the writings of the sociologists C. W. Mills, Wolff, and Nisbet (see Bibliography) and Vol. 95, (January 5, 1970), pp. 30-39; Murray Kempton, "Status-Ticians in Limbo," Playboy Magazine, (September 1961), pp. 117-122.

<sup>2</sup>John Madge, The Tools of Social Science, New York: Anchor Books, 1953.

<sup>3</sup>William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust. New York: Random House, 1949, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup>The word, social, is being used here and in the future to imply simply an awareness of the feelings and attitudes of others and behavior influenced by such awareness. The stress is here on an intelligent sensitivity. The adjective, sociological, conversely, is used throughout this writing to indicate a specific background in the discipline of sociology including training in research and methodology.

<sup>5</sup>Ralph Thomlinson, Sociological Concepts and Research. New York: Random House, 1965, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Perhaps one day, our sociology textbooks will be illustrated with suitable excerpts from the classics. There is no term (to my knowledge) in sociology which would not lend itself to a graphic delineation of this sort. What better way to demonstrate the virility of norms in society than in the appropriate scene or scenes from The Scarlet Letter?

CHAPTER I  
SURVEY OF THE FIELD, SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE

Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be  
increased.

Daniel, 12:4

The sociology of literature announced its arrival in the thirties, and it has been announcing its arrival periodically ever since. Among writers in the field, past and present, there is no common ground, not even sufficient agreement to make for (systematic) disagreement; for every such writer there is a different approach, a conflicting definition. The sociology of literature is protean in its many forms and shapes; as such the area of study does not appear to be highly regarded or regarded at all by influential people in sociology.

The very name, sociology of literature, indicates an area of overlap between two separate but complementary bodies of knowledge, sociology and literature. Ideally, the work in this area done by English specialists and sociologists should coincide. In actual fact, the two schools have remained no less oblivious of each other than they have of their very oblivion. The sociology of literature, in short, is not all that its name implies. The majority of writers in the field are specialists in English language and literature. What they mean by "conducting a sociological study" of a work of art turns out to mean no more than singling out some social factors.

The sociologist is no less myopic in his perspective; he is typically concerned not with the literature itself but with the role of the writer, the reading public, the purpose of the art-form in society. And if the content of the work of literature should happen to be the sociologist's source of investigation, a quantitative study, more often than not, is the method of approach. The last decade, however, has seen one or two promising developments; by promising, I mean that finally the content of the selection of literature per se is being analyzed for insights in a manner similar to that in which psychologists and psychoanalysts, since the time of Freud, have dealt with the classics of literature.<sup>1</sup> What we would want here is that the sociologically trained mind be brought to the analysis of art, of literature.

In light of the ambiguity of the term, sociology of literature, a nebulous, amorphous construct signifying everything and nothing all at once, and in light of the fact that the field is nascent if not exactly new, perhaps we should set it aside altogether. By virtue of its unfamiliarity perhaps literary sociology would be a less confusing name.

The few books that have been written in this supposed branch of sociology deserve some attention here, if for no other reason than that they represent pioneer efforts, and as such crop up again and again in the relevant journal articles. For the sake of simplification, we will discuss these works, first concentrating on the longer, then on the shorter ones; the arrangement in each case will be chronological. The lists are by no means definitive; the authors are sociologists unless otherwise indicated.

Francis Merrill, a steady contributor to this field, came out with a book, Social Disorganization, in 1934, in which he explored literary works for clues about disorganization in society. Themes in post-war literature were studied as a barometer of contemporary attitudes. Merrill upheld "the reflective theory" of literature which, in contrast to "the control theory," believes that fiction reflects social forces rather than that social forces are to a large degree molded by influential works of art.

In Hugh Duncan's oft quoted Language and Literature in Society, 1953, as with most of the books in the subject, the preface is the most noteworthy part, the most germane to our purposes. Great literature to Duncan is the conscious exploration through the imagination of the possibilities of human actions in society. The connection with sociology follows from this definition. Traditions, folkways and mores are experienced as forms of expression, says the author. Chapters follow on various kinds of art as magical art, for example. The point of view throughout is very vague, very general--there is only one short quote from the world of literature.

David Riesman delves into fiction in his Individualism Reconsidered, 1954. What he does in this collection of essays is not to say anything directly about the sociology of literature but to simply "plunge in." The shortcomings of the academic world are portrayed as found in the novel, We Happy Few. In fact, throughout the book points are reinforced with graphic literary reference.

In most of the surveys of this limited area, Lowenthal is referred to as a leading figure. This is why he is presented here. In Literature and the Image of Man, 1957, he makes elaborate use of bits

and pieces of literature to examine what they say about man. However, as he discusses these elements in either a philosophical or a psycho-analytical vein--e.g., characters in The Tempest as personification of the id and ego<sup>3</sup>--his work would hardly qualify as one in sociology.

Robert Escarpit's Sociology of Literature, a book written in 1958 and recently translated from the French, talks about the large following this field has among sociologists in France. The sociology of literature is defined narrowly as dealing with the effects of man on books and books on men. Beyond the preface, the predominant concern is with facts and statistics pertaining to writers. Escarpit locates them geographically in France, notes their ages, and how many books each has produced. I did not find such systematic analysis particularly enlightening.

Coser's popular book, Sociology Through Literature, is a collection of excerpts from the literary classics with special relevance for sociology. Though the selections are presented without comment, the arrangement under topic headings such as social status and the crowd provides sufficient organization and Coser's preface provides one of the best discussions of the potential sociological role of literature. He defines the sociology of literature as "a specialized area of study which focuses upon the relation between a work of art, its public, and the social structure in which it is produced and received."<sup>4</sup>

The Arts in Society, 1964, edited by Robert Wilson, presents several dynamic essays on the major sociological themes in such masterpieces as Robinson Crusoe and the short stories of Fitzgerald. Plots and characters, however, are not approached in any detail; general themes and types of characters only are presented.



A rare find of the same year is E. Digby Baltzell's The Protestant Establishment, one chapter of which, in the manner of Riesman, plunges unknowingly into the sociology of literature. Baltzell's focus here in his section "The Intellectual as Artist," though concise is both very sociological and very "close up" in its handling of the literature. What I mean will become apparent only in a direct quote from his discourse on Fitzgerald and social status in the 1920's. His approach, simple and direct, is a good example of how literature and sociology can be blended.

But if Gatsby's world symbolized the New Man's corruption of the American Dream of Success, the Buchanans stood for the corruption of this dream by the establishment: "They were a careless people, Tom and Daisy--they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness. . ."

The pity is that his adventure into the realm of fiction is so brief.

Sociological journals have somewhat more to offer to the sociology of literature. Coming out in 1936 Melvin Vincent's essay, "Regionalism and Fiction" points up one insight that accrues from good reading, a grasping of the local color of the area under observation. We can learn of Maine, he says, of their unique folkways and mores, from the tales of Mary Ellen Chase. Novelists present materials which the sociologist-regionalist cannot afford to ignore.<sup>5</sup>

Ruth Inglis in "An Objective Approach to the Relationship between Fiction and Society" tests Merrill's reflection theory by a very exact analysis of the changing role of the heroine in Post stories. She finds, indeed, American ideals and traditions are mirrored here--the belief in freedom of opportunity and the status quo. She is in

agreement with Vincent that regional fiction would be an undeniable asset to the sociologist, yet she observes that no attempt has been made to discover the accuracy with which authors have depicted the social conditions of their cultural areas.<sup>6</sup>

Bloch discusses the evolution of the sociology of literature. Sociologists are concerned, he says, with why the work came to be written, what relationship there is to other works in the field, why the creation was accepted, and the basic values expressed.<sup>7</sup>

There is an article by Ina Telberg, "Heroes and Villains of Soviet Drama" in which ideal types of the Bolshevik woman are constructed.<sup>8</sup> In order to determine the degree of racial and ethnic discrimination as reflected in short stories, Berelson and Salter, after an intensive study of 198 stories, concluded that WASPs got preferable treatment on every index than did the minority groups and foreigners.<sup>9</sup>

Barnett and Gruen note in 1948 that sociologists now accept the idea of analyzing fiction for worthwhile content. They examine locales, comparing the way they are portrayed in fiction with census data only to conclude that literature is not very factual.<sup>10</sup> A year later Hume and Gerth take an opposite stand, that literature does express the national traditions and values.<sup>11</sup>

Albrecht did a quantitative study of magazine fiction to find that norms and values of society were upheld but not at rates commensurate to actuality.<sup>12</sup> David Noble criticizes Dreiser's imaginary enterprise for its old-fashioned, Spencerian line of thinking, but he does not belittle the informative role of popular writing.<sup>13</sup> There are many articles in this same journal on various writers of fiction. Most, however, are not sociological in nature and, therefore, will be

omitted here.

An interesting account of "the image of the scientist in science fiction" is found under that title by Walter Hirsch. It is a quantitative assessment of an occupational role in literature.<sup>14</sup> Herbert Gamberg examines "the modern literary ethos." To his chagrin he finds sociologists have rather neglected the field, that science has superseded "the dignity once held by belles-lettres."<sup>15</sup> In that volume is a discussion of the Southern myth as echoed in literary works. The viewpoint is very general.<sup>16</sup>

The sixties saw more sophisticated developments. Francis Merrill's "Stendhal and the Self: A Study in the Sociology of Literature" is the first journalistic effort we have seen where the author brings his trained mind to a close appraisal of a work of literature per se, where he constructs a parallel between events in fiction and an appropriate sociological theory. In this case he is showing how Stendhal anticipated many of the insights concerning the interactionist conception of the self in Mead. In The Red and the Black, he says, we see love in the self-other relationship. Gradually we witness the development of self as the hero takes on the role of others and derives his self-image thereby.<sup>17</sup>

Belok shows how the professor is presented as an eccentric creature in the novels.<sup>16</sup> Margaret Hewitt looks to Victorian literature as the best source of discovering the caste-like status of women.<sup>18</sup>

Francis Merrill in "Balzac as Sociologist: A Study in the Sociology of Literature" presents a convincing argument for Balzac's accuracy as a sociologist. Balzac's skill is shown in his handling of group interaction, the deviant group, the reference group. This

author, Merrill concludes, presented individuals and groups with an amazing verisimilitude; as such he was a sociological novelist.<sup>19</sup> Merrill discusses his field in another article in some depth. He lists three common concerns of writers in the field, of the relationships: between the literary work and the reader. His is an additional approach which regards literature as social interaction in imagination, a form of qualitative analysis also suggested by Lowenthal and Duncan.<sup>20</sup>

Michael Gorden makes some good points about the juvenile delinquent novel which he has studied in some depth. Before the 1930's, the delinquent was seen in a state of noble rebellion (e.g., Huckleberry Finn). Today, they are seen, typically, as the products of broken homes.<sup>21</sup>

#### SURVEY OF THE CRITICISM OF WILLIAM FAULKNER

When Faulkner constructed his vast network, laid out his county of obsessed and brooding inhabitants, he was unwittingly setting up a gold mine for the adventurous critic. His method of story-telling was unique; even more so was his style of writing. Because there was a certain quality about his works that repelled even as it attracted, critics have been divided both among and within themselves. And repelled or attracted, sometimes it is difficult in any one critic to determine which is the case.

Typically, there was little public recognition of Faulkner's works until he won the Nobel Prize for Literature for the year 1949, though there was some initial reception and had been spurts of attention here and there. In 1946, when Cowley edited The Portable Faulkner, most of his books were out of print, and his not-exceptional brother, John, was earning more money than he. So he did not achieve international fame,

then, until the second half of the century; yet before that time he had already completed the largest part and best of his work, among them:

The Sound and the Fury, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, Intruder in the Dust.

Hoffman (William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism), views the author's accomplishment as a long and bumpy uphill struggle. From the start, there were two basic tendencies, but the one gradually came to dominate, to supersede the other. Faulkner was not universally derided before the 1940's nor altogether worshipped thereafter. Surveying some of the major criticism his publications received--the bibliography of criticism alone in Modern Fiction Studies, 1967, covers 45 pages--one will observe that always have some maintained a love-hate relationship with him. His work was said to be perversely peopled with morons and nymphomaniacs, to be a summoner of the "gross animal instincts in the reader," to use prose that is "elaborate, intermittently incoherent and ungrammatical, thunderous, polyphonic rhetoric." Faulkner was said to be the best and worst writer that America had produced; to moralize too much and to be devoid of scruples. He was hailed as master of English and described as being needlessly involuntarily and redundant. He was said to preach overmuch for integration and to be a segregationist. His writing style has been condemned as being sensational, and for being "dull, dull, dull." In sum, critics have been attracted to Faulkner's writings to an unprecedented degree. Whether their works have been laudatory or denigrating they, the critics, show all signs of being engaged in a conflict that can be characterized as approach-avoidance.

In spite of the divergence of opinion over Faulkner's merit, the early 1950's witnessed persistent, more-or-less victory for the positive

forces. Undoubtedly, human nature being what it is, this was a consequence of "the halo effect" following his international recognition in 1950.

Praised or ridiculed, Faulkner was not always understood. O'Donnell (1939) argued that so far from "being without a conscience" the author was a moralist, pitting in his books, the forces of evil (parvenus) against the forces of good (old aristocracy). Nevertheless, he seemed unduly perturbed about the author's ostensible romanticization of the past.

Cowley (1946) marked a milestone in critical history in his enlightening preface to an edition of Faulkner's works. At last, after all these years here was someone on the right track. His interpretation was characterized by a recognizable sociological bent (in the broad sense), a fact which was not without its effect on subsequent readers and critics. Cowley evidenced a greater understanding of the South and its history than his predecessors, and that is probably why he was more successful. Finding in novel after novel the same inexorable theme, the legend, the myth of the Deep South, a frustrated not region but nation trying to relive its fictive past, he sums up the "Yoknapatawpha Saga" in a few paragraphs. The South was settled by good guys--self-made aristocrats (actually possible then) like the Sartoris and Compson clans--and bad guys like Sutpen and the Snopeses, upstarts, ruthlessly ambitious. Both tribes of men wanted to leave behind sons who would thrive in a lasting social order. But slavery, by means of its concomitant cruelty and suppressed emotions, put a curse on the land. (Faulkner states this philosophy in several of his works.) The Snopeses who used any means to the end, naturally would triumph over the gentlemanly

and refined. Almost all the modern characters, Cowley emphasizes, are haunted by the past and ultimately defeated. (This would have been true of the novels written up to that time.)

Robert Penn Warren immediately picked up the thread from Cowley: "No land in all fiction," he writes, "is more painstakingly analyzed from the sociological standpoint." He remarks the wide array of social classes represented in Faulkner's novels, the significance of marks of social class and occupational pursuit. He has compassion for the troubles of the Mississippi author of whom he says, "Perhaps no novelist of our century has suffered so persistent an attack in his lifetime of writing, as no author has been more valiantly defended."<sup>22</sup>

Simultaneously, there ran hostile, misguided currents of criticism. Thus as late as 1968 we hear Faulkner described as "a regressive agrarian who had no idea of the sexual, racial, and economic issues in the South."<sup>23</sup> While another source in the same year decries his supposed "shift toward moral nihilism" as evidenced in the doings of the convict, Mink Snopes.

Psychoanalytical interpretations have paid surprisingly little attention to the works of Faulkner, perhaps owing to the fact that he was not in the main, a psychological author. In any case, there are a couple of outstanding examples. One writer unhesitatingly interprets the characters in The Sound and the Fury as representing the id (Benjy), the ego (Quentin), and the superego (Jason). Another goes to great lengths to establish that an escaped convict's flirtation with freedom was a reliving of the traumatic birth experience, the breaking of the umbilical cord.

Critics in literary journals give a lot of attention, predictably, to imagery and symbolism. Thus, many Christ figures are found and explored at some depth. The earthy Lena in Light in August is typically

seen as either the Virgin Mary or the fertility goddess, Diana. The character of Eula, evidently because she is sexy, promiscuous, is construed in a similar way. And any time a character undergoes a trip, the journey becomes one through life or manhood (if a boy is involved) though at times the "road imagery" is said to represent man's search for self. And in regard to people's names, the onomatopoeic contingencies are never overlooked. (E.g., Joanna Burden must bear the "burden" of racial guilt even if she happens to be a northern freethinker.)

Only two of the 1000 or so references are sociological in nature; they both are found in Mississippi Quarterly. Their merit is that they are written by trained sociologists, their shortcomings that from a literary point of view, they are too brief, perfunctory. Scott Greer views *Light in August* through sociologically-tinted glasses. His focus, as one would expect, is on the character, Joe Christmas, a man who could never verify nor disprove that he had Negro blood. Because his ancestry was indefinite, Greer tells us, he was a nonbelonging man, a member of the neither world. On a broader level, he sees in Yoknapatawpha County a microscopic South. Faulkner, to this critic, is a fighter of formal relationships, tyranny, social injustice, prejudice, and repressive moral codes. The sociologist's observations are certainly accurate, and they bring to Faulknerian criticism a much needed new dimension.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Joe Shaw uses a sociological frame of reference for his critique. Faulkner, he says, reflects a Southern social heritage in his writings. In his, Faulkner's novels, action is seen as motivated by the desire for a caste system, a widespread belief in the animal nature of Negroes, a contempt for the poor whites, and the assumption that only the South can understand Negroes. No attention is devoted to



any specific work or character; this essay is concise, the approach very general.

Edmond Volpe's A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner provides, inadvertently or not, an excellent source book for the sociologist; that is, from his comprehensive discussion of the significance of the goings on in the town of Jefferson, the reader is made aware of some of the reasons Faulkner's characters behave as they do. Volpe is principally concerned with what the author is saying about man, about human nature, not how stories from The Golden Bough have been interwoven with Faulkner's own or how one minor character, for instance, at the climax of the novel is symbolic of an earlier, major character. What this presentation is concerned with, basically, is not what but why: why certain personality types are recurrent, why the adolescents in these books mature in the direction they do, why primitive man (he who lives in harmony with nature) is less conflict-ridden than the urbane.

Among the basic themes in Faulkner are, according to A Reader's Guide: that modern society is a wasteland--man's individualism is threatened by moral righteousness and rigidity; that the youth is a prisoner of his past, of social and moral taboos, and of his own introspective personality; that primitive man who has stayed apart from society somehow finds life less problematic.

In short, though Volpe does not present a systematic sociological analysis as was hardly his intention, he does manage to pull together facts for a ready sociological consideration. We have only to take his interpretation one step further and we are on the road to accomplishing our task of socio-literary inquiry.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Among outstanding examples of modern psychoanalytical and psychological writers are: Ernest Jones, Hamlet and Oedipus. London: Gol-lancz, 1949; Harold McCurdy, The Personality of Shakespeare. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953; Erich Fromm, "Franz Kafka," in Philips, Art and Psychoanalysis. New York: Criterion, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Riesman certainly qualifies as a sociologist by virtue of his work if not his training.

<sup>3</sup>Leo Lowenthal, Literature and the Image of Man. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957, pp. 57-97.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis Coser, Sociology through Literature. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.

<sup>5</sup>Melvin Vincent, "Regionalism and Fiction," Social Forces, Vol. 14, 1963.

<sup>6</sup>Ruth Inglis, "An Objective Approach to the Relationship between Fiction and Society," American Sociological Review, Vol. 3, 1938.

<sup>7</sup>H. A. Bloch, "Towards the Development of a Sociology of Literature and Art-Forms," American Sociological Review, Vol. 8, 1943.

<sup>8</sup>Ina Telberg, "Heroes and Villains of Soviet Drama," American Sociological Review, Vol. 9, 1944.

<sup>9</sup>Bernard Berelson and Patricia Salter, "Majority and Minority Americans," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 26, 1948.

<sup>10</sup>James Barnett and Rhoda Gruen, "Recent American Divorce Novels 1938-1945," Social Forces, Vol. 26, 1948.

<sup>11</sup>P. Hume and H. Gerth, "Values in Mass Periodical Fiction, 1921-1940," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 13, 1949.

<sup>12</sup>Milton Albrecht, "Does Literature Reflect Common Values?" American Sociological Review, Vol. 21, 1956.

<sup>13</sup>David Noble, "Dreiser and Veblen: The Literature of Cultural Change," Social Research, Vol. 24, 1957.

<sup>14</sup>Walter Hirsch, "Image of the Scientist in Science Fiction," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 63, 1958.

- <sup>15</sup>Herbert Gamberg, "The Modern Literary Ethos: A Sociological Interpretation," Social Forces, Vol. 37, 1958.
- <sup>16</sup>Hugh Holman, "Literature and Culture: The Fugitive Agrarians," Social Forces, Vol. 37, 1958.
- <sup>17</sup>Francis Merrill, "Stendhal and the Self: A Study in the Sociology of Literature," Sociology and Social Research, Vol. 50, 1965.
- <sup>18</sup>M. Belok, "Social Attitudes toward the Professor in Novels," Journal of Educational Sociology, Vol. 34, 1961.
- <sup>19</sup>Francis Merrill, "Balzac as Sociologist: A Study in the Sociology of Literature," Sociology and Social Research, Vol. 53, 1968.
- <sup>20</sup>Francis Merrill, Social Research, Vol. 34, 1967.
- <sup>21</sup>M. Gorden, "The American Juvenile Delinquency Novel," Social Research, Vol. 53, 1968.
- <sup>22</sup>R. P. Warren in M. Cowley, The Portable Faulkner. New York: Viking Press, 1946.
- <sup>23</sup>Criticism of Faulkner in Journal of American Studies, II:1.
- <sup>24</sup>Scott Greer, "Joe Christmas and the Social Self," Mississippi Quarterly, Vol. XI, 1958.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SCIENCE OF LITERATURE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A novel is a mirror carried along a roadway.  
Stendhal

The plays of Sophocles and Euripedes are a major source of knowledge and speculation concerning the role of women in ancient Greek life. The Prologue to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales is the best representative of the occupational structure of his day. The way a nation goes, writes Edith Hamilton, whether in mind or spirit, is decisive in its effect upon art.

The three basic propositions of the present discussion will be (1) that there is a relationship between the sociologist and artist in that each is engaged in an epistemological search, (2) that the ultimate aim of each is to explain various phenomena of human nature, and (3) that the subject matter is commonly the same in both cases, the sociologist writing about norms, society, and the group influence, the novelist writing of these in expressing the norms of his society and his own particular milieu.

The similarity between sociology and art is in their struggle to define life. In other words, their goals are the same if not their means.

Artists and sociologists alike have noted the close nexus between art and life. Henry James did not equivocate on the subject of the

artform. "The only reason for the existence of the novel," he wrote, "is that it does attempt to represent life."<sup>1</sup> Says Coser, the sociologist, "Literature though it may also be many other things, is social evidence and testimony."<sup>2</sup> To Plato, art was the imitation of objects and to Shakespeare a holding of the mirror up to nature. Nisbet declares, "Any art form that is serious, be it the novel, poem, or painting, is concerned first and foremost with reality."<sup>3</sup> And Lowenthal: "It is the artist who portrays what is more real than reality itself."<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, a positive acquaintance with the first-rate novelist may provide a refreshing source of the type of social revelation which is an essential part of the educational background of the student of society. My basic argument can be summed up in a few words, just as sociology can be an art form so art can be a form of sociology.

To return to the original point, we may say that the sociologist and artist are each engaged in an epistemological search, and that the writer, the good writer, that is, is like the scientist trying to hit upon some truth--which may be small or large, may concern present or past, society or personality--in his explorations though these may sometimes be engaged in more for his own than his reader's benefit.

Even in his search for knowledge there is some similarity between the work of the scientist and artist. Emile Zola points out that a novelist is both an observer--(he presents data as he has observed them, he establishes a solid ground on which characters will stand and his phenomena take place)--and experimenter--(he sets characters of a particular story in motion in order to show that ensuing events are demanded by the original phenomena). Literature is not as certain as science, he concludes, but it is still a groping after truth.<sup>5</sup> And this is its

final aim.

On the whole, sociologists, not anxious to claim a likeness between themselves and writers of fiction, are adamant in their enunciation of the differences. Thomlinson says that what identifies the professional is his greater ability to make skillful use of the tools of his trade. "A novelist may make important quasi-sociological contributions" but sociologists are a different breed altogether. Novelists do not operate in systematic fashion.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Robert Nisbet, one of the more humanistic of the sociologists, draws a sharp distinction between these four outlooks--the religious, the legal, journalistic, and artistic--and sociology. In the approaches of these four to social problems the emphasis is on dramatization, exposure, condemnation, or repression whereas the primary objective of the sociologist is to uncover the causes of the problems, to seek their determining contexts and their relation to other areas of social behavior. The scientist as scientist seeks knowledge of the conditions involved, how the problems have come to be as we find them, and what the crucial factors are in their incidence.<sup>7</sup>

Paradoxically, Nisbet adopts a conflicting viewpoint elsewhere. This gives me the opportunity to present the opposing view in the words of the same writer. In the Nineteenth Century, the writer of "Sociology as an Art Form" explains that two myths grew up, one, that art was not concerned with truth or reality and two, that science was guided not by inspiration but by method. "Nothing could be further from the truth. Any art form that is serious, be it the novel, poem, or painting, is concerned first and foremost with reality. . .I venture this judgement that there is more in common between Picasso and Einstein--an objective

in inspiration, and mode of fulfillment--than there is between Picasso and. . . 'dustbowl empiricism.'"<sup>8</sup> And later: "The artist's interest in form is the scientist's interest in structure."<sup>9</sup>

My contention is here no stronger than that of Nisbet's more recent article, that there is a difference between science and art (the major distinction being in regard to medium of communication) but that there is also a viable affinity between them, both in method and in purpose.

The similarity does not end here. The final point, that the subject matter of the two disciplines is often the same, can be explored briefly. Let us look at a typical introductory textbook in sociology, Bierstedt, The Social Order.<sup>10</sup> The table of contents lists four basic topics (excluding the science of sociology). For each topic we can list a novel with this as its predominant concern: Culture and Socialization: Mitchener, Hawaii, Social Organization: Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, Social Differentiation: Marquand, Point of No Return, Social Change: Mitchell, Gone with the Wind.

Sociology, says Francis Merrill, is the study of society in interaction, literature is the symbolic depiction of such interaction. The novelist says what the sociologist can't through the greater flexibility in his experimental technique. Literature and sociology both deal with people, places, and things and each has something worthwhile to contribute. "Novels are living sourcebooks to which we go for valid insights about such important sociological concerns as the group, the self, social class (etc.)."<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In recognizing the undeniable relevance of art, both Chinoy and Lundberg, fairly traditional in their outlook, are willing to admit that

one can learn a great deal about crime from the novel, Crime and Punishment. Madge recounts an instance of a serious student turning from psychology to literature because she found it more relevant to the world around her. If social scientists were less afraid to rely on intuitive insights and spontaneous personal data, concludes Madge, such disillusionment would not occur.<sup>12</sup>

Concerning her study of the ancient Greeks, Edith Hamilton declares, "Their stories and their plays tell more about them than all their histories."<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, too, said art has a higher truth than history since art (poetry) expresses truth of general application whereas history is partial and limited. His reasoning would pertain to fiction and to sociology equally well. I would not place literature above social science, but the basic problem with sociology, I think, is that sociology has no soul.\*

\*As it once did have.



#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, The Future of the Novel. New York: Vintage Books, 1956, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis Coser, Sociology through Literature. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Misbet, "Sociology as an Art Form," Pacific Sociological Review, Vol. 5, 1962, pp. 67-74.

<sup>4</sup>Leo Lowenthal, Literature and the Image of Man. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Emile Zola, "The Experimental Novel," in Becker, Documents of Medieval Literary Realism. New Jersey: Princeton Press, 1963, pp. 162-196.

<sup>6</sup>Ralph Thomlinson, Sociological Concepts and Research. New York: Random House, 1967, p. 142.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Morton and Robert Nisbet, Contemporary Social Problems. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966, p. 16 (chapter credited to Nisbet).

<sup>8</sup>Nisbet, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Bierstedt, The Social Order. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.

<sup>11</sup>Francis Merrill, "The Sociology of Literature," Sociological Review, Vol. 34, 1967, pp. 648-659.

<sup>12</sup>John Madge, The Tools of Social Science. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1965, preface.

<sup>13</sup>Edith Hamilton, The Greek Way. p. 77.

CHAPTER III  
CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION

I am a part of all I have met.  
"Ulysses"

Culture is social heredity, a way of thinking, feeling, and believing that sets apart one group from another. The individual's behavior is controlled by his culture in many deep and pervasive ways. Even what we think of as his personality is culturally determined. Culture can be considered the mold in which the individual figure is cast.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the close relationship between personality and culture, members of one nation or tribe appear homogeneous to outsiders. "What the kind of speech, tools, religion is depends absolutely on the culture not on him (the person)."<sup>2</sup> A group member absorbs the essential content of a culture by means of socialization. That is, he is reinforced in regard to certain desirable patterns and at the same time sanctioned or ignored in regard to the undesirable ones. George Mead<sup>3</sup> shows how this process of character forming is achieved through identification with significant others in one's life.

The significant others to a child would be the first primary group he encounters, his family. Through the medium of parenthood, the culture is transmitted to the neophyte. This is the most distinctive and universal function of the family, the socialization of its members.<sup>4</sup> By virtue of the response an individual gets from the world around him so he comes

in time to see himself and to react accordingly. In this sense, socialization is not confined to the early years but is a process operating throughout life.

That culture is a determining factor in personality is one of the basic contentions of sociology. William Faulkner shares this view, a fact that will become apparent as we study his presentation of personality or character. If I were to frame a hypothesis for this chapter it would go something as follows. There is a relationship between the writings of Faulkner and the sociologist in that, although differing in regard to tools, they share the same fundamental concerns and ultimate aims; they both see man within a limited social network--region, town, race, class, occupational group, etc. At about that point, however, I would abandon the scientific format. I would discuss each point separately and fully, but my aim would be less to scientifically verify than merely to present a case.

Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi is at once a mythical and an actual region. This is a land of over 15,000 inhabitants, a region sui generis, distinctly different from other regions in the United States and yet ultimately representative of them all. The story of this county is the story of planter and tenant farmer, Negro and white, of three generations of settlers. It is both a story of conflict along each of these three levels and a parable or legend of all the Deep South.

Faulkner's ultimate aim, not unlike the sociologist's was to arrive at some epistemological truth about human nature. To this end, he constructed a whole county and waxed people not as singular individuals primarily, but as archetypes of a certain behavior, as means of probing man's social conscience. Using his home county as a microcosm for the

whole South, he set out to make of the South a microcosm for man in the cultural setting.

How even the personality make-up of his characters is socially and culturally determined--"His was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth"\*--will be the present consideration. The method of approach I have termed socioanalysis.

For over a century personality types in fiction have been psychoanalyzed. Now they are to be "socioanalyzed." The process of socioanalysis as applied to the study of fiction can be defined as the method of studying, appreciating the personality make-up of a particular literary figure in terms of social origins and influences brought to bear throughout the course of the novel or of studying the various aspects of a fictional social institution or system presented in the work. Thus, for example, an adolescent might be seen as having behavior problems at an earlier period of development but because he or she comes from a family who is "taking out" on the child the fact that they are in a socially stagnant position when mobility is the aim, or because that family is a member of a marginal group.

The socioanalytical point of view is not setting out to displace the psychoanalytical--the latter is useful for "diagnosing" the usual cases of biological neurosis such as Lady Macbeth's and Holden Caulfield's compulsive hand-washing ritual and for those innate personality variables such as one's position on the introversion-extroversion and authoritarian-tender-minded continuum (Eysenck).<sup>5</sup> No, the sociological approach would seek to do no more than to offer its services in

\*William Faulkner, Absolam, Absolam; New York: Random House, 1936, p. 12.

broadening rather than redesigning the picture, not for the purpose of raising the level of English criticism, though this would perhaps be among its collateral benefits, but for the epistemological and dynamic purpose of engaging in a new kind of exploration, and exploration of the realm of human nature or the verisimilitude of human nature.

The three individual characters chosen for close consideration are Joe Christmas of Light in August, the marginal man; Thomas Sutpen of Absolam, Absolam!, as seeker after esteem, and Jason Compson of The Sound and the Fury as last surviving heir to a socially decadent family. The dynamics of socialization will be considered in the novel which best depicts the phenomenon, again The Sound and the Fury. Finally, direct representative quotes from Faulkner's work on the subject of personality in the group setting will be presented.

The three characters mentioned above, like all Faulkner's major dramatis personae carry a significance that is universal. They are more types, conglomerations, than individuals. This is not to say that they are stock figures--which would make their existence shallow--but conversely that they are prime examples of experience of a particular sort, not that they are less than whole but that they are more than one. Faulkner's characters are based on people from his own experience--this is why they are so often alike--the Negro cooks are all one cook; the sensitive adolescent boys are all one boy; the old aristocrats are all one and the same. They are also alike because their creator is using them as symbols, because he is not talking about one man but man, not one Negro but the Negro.

These symbols, archetypes, are viewed by the author as inevitable products of the cultural and group experience. Thus more than one

character is haunted and eventually destroyed by his too-rigid puritanical background, more than one is victim of a lower-class upbringing; more than one is prevented from normal interpersonal relations because of racial brainwashing. In this way, Faulkner's "social man" is the end-product of a peculiar process of conditioning. "To me no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. . . All of his or her ancestry, background is all a part of himself and herself at any moment."<sup>6</sup>

#### Joe Christmas

Owing to his name and the fact of his eventual persecution at thirty-five, critics are prone to consider him a Christ figure in some cases, the anti-Christ in others. To the sociologist Christmas would be the marginal man.

His mother was allowed to die in childbirth by his grandfather who refused to summon medical help in the belief that the father of the baby must have been a Negro. The baby is put in an orphanage where he spends the first five years of his life; his grandfather a shadowy image in the background, spreading rumors that the child is black.

The boy is transferred to a Negro orphanage through the revenge of a dietician who was overheard by the child when lovemaking. A farmer, spotting the white face among the black, adopts him. Though a merciless man, he can communicate with the boy better than his wife who uses tenderness. Joe endures years of beatings from his foster father, until finally having had enough, the boy savagely attacks him and runs away.

Joe's sexual adjustment is no better than his familial one. The thought of sex often makes him want to vomit. When he does eventually, however, form a fairly solid relationship with a prostitute--he even

confesses his doubtful racial origin to her--this ends in a needless squabble.

For awhile Joe lives with a Negro woman and tortures himself with trying to become a Negro, to "breathe into himself the dark odor." Then, even more aberrant, he practically murders a white prostitute on learning that she serves Negroes. So shocked and revolted is Joe at the discovery that he does not recover from the trauma for two years. He continually tries to punish himself: "Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a Negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; now he fought the Negro who called him white."<sup>10</sup>

For three years, he takes up habitation with a white woman, Joanna. Then one night she gets too insistent about praying over him. True to nature, he loses his temper and kills her. The townspeople, in a horrified stupor, speculate about the murder. But it is not until one of them speaks up that they can define the situation.

"Christmas," Brown says. "The man that killed that white woman after he had lived with her in plain sight of the whole town, and you all letting him get further and further away. He's got nigger blood in him."<sup>11</sup>

What ensues from that point on is a bloody lynch ritual, a horrific psycho-drama in which feelings of guilt and fear are displaced into an available victim. Light in August thus becomes a paradigm of all lynching stories.

The passion of the mob becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts, and the cathartic climax gets underway. As the code of white supremacy takes over, pity and terror in the Aristotelian sense are generated in the reader--he pities the hero in his suffering and

feels terror at the reality of what happens to him. More than this, the tragedy is true to classical standards in that in terms of magnitude of the action which far transcends the immediate time and location. In the vicarious experience is a moment of truth both because we are all "involved in mankind" and because, like the tragic hero, we are all victims of our society.

As sociologists, we might say that the childhood scars suffered by Joe Christmas were such that he could never make an adequate adjustment to other people. As a child, Joe was institutionalized, and at the most crucial stage. Harlow's untouched monkeys, we will remember, developed neither socially nor sexually.<sup>12</sup> And the hospitalized children observed by Spitz were severely handicapped in social relations.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, Joe cannot return love when it is offered.

It was not the hard work which he hated, not the punishment and injustice. . . It was the woman: that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men.<sup>14</sup>

Joe can never maintain a healthy relationship with the opposite sex. This makes him especially vulnerable to the race-identity crisis, a problem with which he is obsessed and which ultimately destroys him. Early in the novel, a colored boy comments on his problem.

"What are you watching me for boy?" and he said, "How come you are a nigger?" and the nigger said, "Who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard?" and he says, "I aint a nigger," and the nigger says, "You are worse than that. You dont know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know."

Everett Hughes has defined the marginal man as "in the periphery of two different cultures, but neither integrated into nor accepted by either one."<sup>15</sup> This is the trouble with Joe; he suffers from a



lacerating identity crisis. Trapped between two sharply demarcated races, he is just the candidate for the role of victim. And the irony is that he looks completely white, that if he did have any Negro blood in him, the amount would be minuscule.

To have survived in the white world he had only to move to a new community. A better adjusted person would certainly have done so. But because of Joe's internalized self-hatred and concomitant masochism, inevitable products of an unloved childhood, no existential freedom of choice for him is possible. The fanatical racism of heritage becomes the final means of realization of his tragic doom. In light of the circumstances surrounding his personality and society, we might say that what befell Joe Christmas was a predetermined as the revelation of a mythical Greek oracle.

The personality of this Faulkner creation, therefore, cannot be understood apart from his culture. And the story of his life has something to say about man's destiny. As such it becomes as abstract an idea greater than an account of one individual and Christmas himself becomes a palpable force as well as a symbol for all man.

Thomas Sutpen

A hillbilly boy turned away from the front door of a mansion, a child in one stroke ineradicably wounded by adult callousness, and a life-long design is in the making. Hurt and angry the boy decides that "to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with."<sup>16</sup>

His ambition then is more than a drive, it is a certainty. Because the boy is sensitive, excessively vulnerable, he must find the type of

security from which vantage point he can never be so stabbed again.

Sutpen like Christmas, at a crucial stage moved from one world into another totally foreign to him. Before the plantation incident he had been sheltered from the modern way of life and social distinctions among people. So he, like Joe Christmas who was shocked by certain biological facts, is suffering from innocence. He never knew that

there was a country all divided and fixed and neat  
with a people living on it all divided and fixed  
and neat because of what color their skins happened  
to be and what they happened to own, and where a  
certain few men. . . had the power of life and  
death and barter and sale over others.<sup>17</sup>

Sutpen approaches civilization in a state of innocence, and it is because of this innocence characterized by a blind trust in rationality that he is corrupted. Choosing to adopt the very worst traits of modern man he becomes a caricature of him. He is cold, hard, and logical; wealth and power he will get at whatever price to others. His inability to recognize the feelings of others, this is his tragic flaw.

Discovering that his wife and therefore, son, have Negro blood, he casts them aside without further ado. To him a contract has been broken; crucial information was withheld at the time of marriage. He discards his wife, therefore, who could never be "adjunctive to the forwarding of the design." Typically, Sutpen provides a financial recompense; this to him is justice. Then he commits robbery, perhaps, or by some unknown devious means gets the money to buy 100 West Indian slaves and to build a magnificent plantation. Then for the sole pragmatic reason of gaining respectability, he marries a local girl.

When the recognized son, Henry brings the first son, Bon, home and when his daughter's engagement to the latter is announced, Sutpen forbids the marriage. Bon's motives here are simply to force the father

to recognize him, "he knew exactly what he wanted; it was just the saying of it--the physical touch even though in secret, hidden--the living touch of that flesh warmed before he was born by the same blood which it had bequeathed him to warm his own flesh with."<sup>18</sup>

The Civil War comes and Henry, having by now been "enlightened" by his father and in an intense emotional reaction to the idea of miscegenation murders Bon. With the two sons now gone forever, Sutpen seduces the granddaughter of a squatter, Wash Jones, hoping to get a son thereby. When a girl is born, Sutpen tells the mother, "Well, Milly; too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable." In mortified rage, Jones kills the plantation owner. Critics of this novel note the parallel between Sutpen's downfall and that of the South which had "erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage." The man with the design, the "ancient varicose and despairing Faustus" achieved his scheme and inadvertent doom by means of stoic self-abnegation, robbery, exploitation (of the Indians who he cheated out of the land and of his second wife, Ellen), repudiation of flesh and blood holding his workers in bondage (not only of born slaves but of a French architect, too) and violation of the rights of lower class whites. It is thus that the tragedy of Sutpen becomes not just the tragedy "that monotonous provincial backwater" but an American tragedy and a tragedy of all man. It is the Horatio Alger myth "gone awry," the "tale of woe" of both inherited disadvantage--the crime of poverty and implied shiftlessness which put Sutpen's personality out of balance in the first place--and sterile success. Sutpen is the ideal-construct of the secularized Puritan.

Doubtless the only pleasure that he ever had. . .  
 was in (his money's representation of a balance  
 in whatever spiritual counting-house he believed  
 would some day pay his sight drafts on self-denial  
 and fortitude.<sup>19</sup>

Sutpen is a symbol of the arrogance of man; his life story, accordingly, is cosmic in import. The title, "Absolam, Absolam!" is indicative that there is a common denominator of human nature which transcends history, that when Sutpen like King David of old, broke the moral law in his rise to power, vengeance was obtained at the hands of the sons of "children born too late into their parents' lives and doomed to contemplate all human behavior through the complex and needless follies of adults."<sup>20</sup> The character of Thomas Sutpen, a man who commits the same unforgivable sin of which he was once victim, and who met both success and doom thereby, is as much the end-product of environmental forces on personal behavior as was Joe Christmas. He is an "acting-out" of Max Weber's Protestant Ethic, and Veblen's seeker after the signs of success. Francis Merrill gives us an explanation for why a person becomes socially mobile, one which applies remarkably well to Faulkner's creation. "The child who suffers from feelings of rejection may develop anxiety that drives him to seek success through upward mobility."<sup>21</sup> And together with a statement from the same source--Francis Merrill--that differential access to the means of achieving life goals is an important factor in personality conflict, we have hit upon one of the most basic sociological truths of Absolam, Absolam!

Jason Compson

Surely one of Faulkner's most interesting creatures is Jason, the narrator of one of the most humorous parts of The Sound and the Fury. We learn about Jason from seeing the world through his mind's eye;

when he grumbles "As long as I have to work ten hours a day to support a kitchen-full of niggers in the style they're accustomed to and send them to the show with every other nigger in the county" we have his whole philosophy of life summed up in a phrase, his views on himself, on race, and on leisure time. Obviously this is a sour and bitter person.

Unlike the cases of the previous characters there is no dramatic story of which Jason is the nucleus. It is his personality rather than his story which is presented in the third section of the novel which he dominates. Jason is a cruel and vindictive man, all head and no heart. His strong predisposition to sadism is made clear in the scene when he maliciously displays an unwanted ticket to the carnival to his maid's son who is acting for it and then first burns one ticket then another in the kitchen fire.

All the way through the narrative, Jason utters a barrage of cynical cliches. "Once a bitch always a bitch" is his opening line. Other characteristic statements are "I don't see how a city no bigger than New York can hold enough people to take the money away from us country suckers," "those grafters in the Mayor's office will split among themselves," "What this country needs is white labor. Let these damn trifling niggers starve for a couple of years, then they'd see."

This long-suffering, put-upon individual has none of the tragic aura attaching to the demonic Sutpen. He is normal, described by Faulkner as "the first sane Compson," and there lies the paradox; he is the man on the street, modern man obsessed with punctuality, mechanical devices, and skimping and saving for capitalistic investment. A divergence from the traditional way of the Southerner, Jason works to outdo the Northerners at their own game. Nor does he live by the code of his

aristocratic forefathers in regard to the Negro race. His attitude is not the idealized one of benign paternalism but an aggressive hatred and resentment.

In light of his background, why is Jason such a redeemless being? In reality, it is his background which has made him this way. The problem with Jason is the problem of being reared to assume a role of an aristocrat when Southern aristocracy, like the South (according to Faulkner) is dead. His was the condition of being brought up as too good to associate with most townspeople and to believe that one's family history not only was a ticket to success in life but was success itself, to be raised by the standards of the place but not of the time and then to learn or perhaps not to learn through bitter experience that with the obliteration of that society in which some were landed gentry and some were slaves and the old values no longer held sway. Where Jason's idealistic brother commits suicide and his sister becomes a wanton woman, he becomes like the latter, a grotesque personification of the opposite values to those he sees crumbling all around him. His extreme prejudice and authoritarianism is a symptom of his own insecurity.

Slater has observed that our culture even imposes upon us the ways that we choose to express our negation.<sup>22</sup> So it is with Jason. To some extent, of course, his negation is second hand. The standards of his parents--"Do you want to poison him with that cheap store cake?"--are already archaic when the Compson children are small.

"I am a part of all I have met," goes the Tennyson line. Jason Compson and Sutpen and Joe Christmas were the finished product of their life's experience. They were a part of all their parents had met as well.

The idea that social scientists can gain a heightened understanding through art is not a new one but it is one that has not always been recognized; part of the task of this work is to enunciate what sort of understanding we may derive therefrom. Melvin Vincent believes that regional literature is important to sociology because of its masterful grasp of cosmic and ecological factors. "To gain a deeper and more thorough understanding of culture and its meaning for personality, the cultural specializations of various regions must have primary consideration in any scientific study of societal phenomena."<sup>23</sup>

The novel, Absolam, Absolam!, is no less suggestive of the mores and mental processes of the diversified South than is historical and sociological research on Southern people. The contrast between the planter and the poor white, the painting of the false Negro-white relationship is the same picture in the novel and in the non-fiction writings of Cash, C. Wann Woodward, Warner, and Dollard. Because in all of these we find in the South the sense of honor and individual responsibility, concept of community, and the "nigger" as a creation of white society. The regional writer draws his themes from the culture of the region and "fundamental to the South was agriculture and a social system based on stability, tradition, class structure, and the powerful idea of an aristocracy."<sup>24</sup>

The potent effects of the socializing process on the individual can be best seen in Faulkner's novel, The Sound and the Fury. Socialization is one of the basic themes of this particular work. The sociologist tells us that the personality is formed, maintained, and changed as the socialization process moves along, that the following factors come into play: biological inheritance, geographical environment and social

nature is a group product.<sup>25</sup> The Sound and the Fury is an exposition of many things but one of them is clearly how the personality is molded by the culture, society and family.

The story is reproduced here in a simplified form that is a grave injustice to the utterly unique method of story-telling in which past and present are continually juxtaposed. The downfall of an upper class family, the Compsons, 1898-1928, is the uniting theme of the novel.

. . . "The weed choked traces of the old ruined lawns and promenades, the house which had needed painting too long already."

It is the "tale told by an idiot" of a mother and father who, unable to accept the fact that they are no longer what they once were, have produced a brood of monomaniac children and grandchildren. It is a tale "of sound and fury, signifying nothing." (Macbeth V, v) The offspring include a neurotic mental retardate "committed to State Asylum, Jackson, 1933," a highly promiscuous girl, "doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it," a potential suicide "who loved death above all, who loved only death," and a cruel egotist who "ended that long line of men who had had something in them of decency and pride even after they had become vanity and selfpity." How did they all get this way, all in one family?

The mother is a hypochondriac obsessed with two things, with the fact that her people were socially beneath her husband's, and with the Compsons' fallen social position in the community. "I'm a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring, but I am," she keeps insisting. In shame at having produced a mentally retarded child, she changes his name to Benjy. Her daughter Caddy, runs off in pregnant disgrace, the son, Quentin, drowns himself at Harvard, and Jason grows



up into a feelingless commercial monster. In the years that pass we see the Compson plantation in wrack and ruin, the number of servants having drastically dwindled, and Jason and Mrs. Compson trying unsuccessfully to rear the next generation, Caddy's unruly daughter, Quentin. Quentin has been given a negative self image as her mother before her; this is one of the main contributing factors to delinquent behavior according to Reckless.<sup>26</sup> Like mother, "There was something terrible in me sometimes at night I could see it grinning at me I could see it through them grinning at me through their faces," like daughter: "I'm bad and I'm going to hell."

As put by the most introspective of the Compson children, "theres a curse on us its not our fault is it our fault." The reference is to peripheral forces at work on the family, the impingement of the past upon the present. But there were also significant forces of the present seeking to wear down the dysfunctional arachronisms.

Historically, a time of dramatic change, both economic--urbanization and industrialization--and culture--new criteria of human worth--many in the South found themselves unable or unwilling to meet the new challenges, to make the necessary break with the old order. Cultural lag, according to the theory of Ogburn generates social problems,<sup>27</sup> and this is what the South was suffering from. Unable to keep up industrially and intellectually, the world was passing them by.

We see these cross-currents at work in The Sound and the Fury as in Faulkner's other major novels. The influential people in the county have no intention of voluntarily surrendering their vested interests and the newcomers are ready to have their due. Significantly, time is a linking motif. Each of the major characters is affected in one way or

another by the passage of time. To Benjy, everything is always in the present tense; Quentin is haunted by clocks the power of which he can never escape; Jason hysterically tries to hold on to his family status at the same time that as a capitalist, he is obsessed with saving and being on time. Only the well adjusted maid, Dilsey, can actually accept time for what it is.

In the early days of Compson history, the family was aristocratic and prosperous. But time has taken its toll, and when we meet them, the Compsons can only cling futilely to the new archaic standards of a bygone era.

Because the Compson parents cannot accept the inevitability of change but the one having become an alcoholic and the other a self-pitying hypochondriac, they fail in their duties to their children. To the extent that they are given no guidance at all, they are prepared to occupy positions pre-ordained by birth. In short, they are socialized for a defunct role in society; naturally they all fail in one way or another.

Now for an immediate verification of all that has gone before, we turn to Comparative Analysis I. Faulkner's sociological acumen should here be readily apparent.

## CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION

Sociological orientations in  
William Faulkner

Sociological orientations among  
social scientists

### Absolam, Absolam!

1. Not the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the other but what each conceived the other to be.  
p. 120
  2. You make so little impression, you see. . . You are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs.  
p. 127
  3. "Judith who had not learned that first principle of penury which is to scimp and save for the sake of scimping and saving."  
p. 156
  4. "So that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him."  
p. 220
  5. He had learned the difference not only between white men and black men but. . . between white man and white men.  
p. 226
1. We always imagine and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind.  
Charles Cooley, Human Nature and the Social Order. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1956, pp. 184-185.
  2. They (people) are plastic to the molding force of the society into which they are born.  
Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture. N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934, p. 254.
  3. Later still (in young adulthood) there is the endless process of working out the modus vivendi between one's present and past.  
Ralph Turner, The Social Context of Ambition. Chandler Pub. Co., 1964, p. 3.
  4. Directly or indirectly the imagination of how we appear to others is a controlling force in all normal minds.  
Cooley, op. cit., p. 203.
  5. Outside the family, the child gradually becomes indoctrinated with an awareness of family differences, particularly with those which affect class structure.  
Carl Backman, Social Psychology. N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968, p. 119.

6. "Perhaps a man builds for his future in more ways than one, not only toward the body which will be his tomorrow or next year, but toward actions."

p. 243

7. "Maybe we are both father. . . Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds. . . let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered reflected in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space to the old ineradical rhythm."

p. 261

### The Sound and the Fury

1. Caddy. Doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it.

preface

2. . . .while she not only drags your name in the dirt but corrupts the very air you breathe. . .

3. And Mother says, "But to have the school authorities think that I have no control over her, that I can't. . ."

p. 198

6. . . .(E)go's role is not static but expected to change in the process of his "growing up"--so that a valuation relative to his own future is very much part of his value acquisition.

Talcott Parsons, The Social System. Glencoe, Ill: The Free Press, 1951, p. 214.

7. As social scientists generally use the term, the "culture" in which your personality has been shaped consists of all the habitual patterns of believing, thinking, feeling which are passed down by learning from one generation to another.

Calhoun, et al., An Introduction to Social Science. Chicago: Lippincott, 1961, p. 8.

1. (T)he early family patterns will be critically important for the individual.

Karl Mannheim, Systematic Sociology. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1957, p. 29.

2. In imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on.

Cooley, op. cit., p. 184.

3. In imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on.

Cooley, op. cit., p. 184.

4. "I don't care," she says, "I'm bad and I'm going to hell, and I don't care. I'd rather be in hell than anywhere you are."

(teen-age girl) p. 207

4. When we, by gossip and rumor label a particular child. . .when we, as a term of disapprobation (by work or deed) call a young man a "hoodlum" we may very well be contributing to establishing him as such.

J. Martin, and J. Fitzpatrick, Delinquent Behavior. N.Y.: Random House, 1968, p. 81.

### Intruder in the Dust

1. "This would not be the first time when to mobs of white men not only old black cats were gray but they didn't always bother to count them either."

p. 51

2. But already they had passed out of the world of man, men: people who worked and had houses and raised families and tried to make a little more money than they perhaps deserved by fair means of course or at least by legal, to spend in a little fun and still save something against old age. Because even as the oak door swung back there seemed to rush out and down at him the stale breath of all human degradation and shame--a smell of creosote and excrement and stale vomit.

3. "Yesterday wont be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began 10,000 years ago. For every boy 14 years old there is the instant when it's still not yet two oclock on that July afternoon in 1863."

p. 94

4. (T)omorrow night is nothing but one long sleepless wrestle with yesterday's ommissions and regrets.

p. 95

1. The unorganized crowd is subjected to a process in which emotion and the capacity for reflection is lowered.

Mannheim, op. cit., p. 105.

2. In the crowd, the close physical contacts, the multitudinous swaying emotions, the gestures, the murmurs and shouts, stir deep-laid strivings and the symptoms of the crowd become intensified, when a like interest is turned into a common interest.

Ibid., p. 104.

3. In each generation the children of a tribe, community, or nation are early indoctrinated with the history of their society. This conveniently introduces them into the folk-ways of the group. . . Moreover this introduction is essential to the continuity of culture.

Backman, op. cit., p. 213.

4. There are the decided influences of early childhood training which carry over to the adolescent and adult personality.

Ibid., p. 137.

5. (The crowd) just gathering, condensing, not expectant nor in anticipation nor even attentive but merely in that preliminary settling down.

p. 136

6. . . . "there looked down upon him and his countless row on row of faces which resembled his face and spoke the same language he spoke and at times even answered to the same names he bore yet between whom and him there was no longer any real kinship and soon there would not even be any contact since the very mutual words they used would no longer have the same significance and soon after that even this would be gone."

p. 138

7. . . . the crowd vainglorious minuscule which he called his memory and his self and his I-Am into that vast teeming. . . world.

p. 207

5. The form of behavior which has come to be designated as "milling" is the basis of social contagion and is the fundamental process through which a uniform mood and imagery is developed in a collectivity.

Turner, et al., Collective Behavior. N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964, p. 58.

6. However painful the initial process of socialization might be, contemporary man is forced to make a choice between different life styles and, within certain limits, to decide for himself.

Raymond Aron, Progress and Disillusion. N.Y.: American Library, 1968, p. 157.

7. The "I" is the response of the organism to the attitudes of others; the "me" is the organized set of attitudes others which one himself assumes.

George Mead, Mind, Self, and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

### The Town

"I mean until one summer some of the church ladies decided to reform him after that it was hard to tell when to speak to him or not. Then the ladies would give up for awhile and it would be all right again."

p. 159

It is through social norms and values that the interpersonal relations of members to a society are controlled and directed.

R. Thomlinson, Sociology Concepts and Research. N.Y.: Random House, 1967, p. 6.

### Light in August

1. "He had to resign from the church, but he wouldn't leave Jefferson. . . They tried to get him to, for his own sake as well as the  
(continued)

1. Group norms are, of course, not abstract rules but visible patterns or types of behavior and attitude.  
Mannheim, op. cit., p. 10.

(continued) town's, the church's. That was pretty bad on the church, you see. Having strangers, come here and hear about it, and him refusing to leave the town."

p. 46

2. "A man will talk about how he's like to escape from living folks. But it's the dead folks that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and dont try to hold him, that he cant escape from."

(Hightower) p. 58

3. Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing ever wonders.

p. 91

4. He ran among running people, overtaking and passing them, since he had an objective and they did not, they were just running, the black, blunt, huge automatic opening a way for him like a plow.

p. 228

5. He seems to watch himself among faces, always among, enveloped and surrounded by, faces, as though he watched himself in his own pulpit, from the rear of the church, or as though he were a fish in a bowl. And more than that: the faces seem to be mirrors in which he watches himself. He knows them all; he can read his doings in them.

p. 367

6. . . .he talks to the Face:  
"Perhaps I accepted more than I could perform? But is that criminal? And the face: "It was not  
(continued)

2. Individuals who have internalized controls, and hence a strong capacity to experience guilt, are said to respond to anger-arousing situations by turning their anger against themselves.

Philip Slater, in Smelser, Sociology. N.Y.: Wiley and Sons, 1957, p. 593.

3. (T)he view here maintained is that human nature is not something existing separately in the individual, but a group nature. . . It is the nature which is developed and expressed in those simple, face-to-face groups of the family, the playground, and the neighborhood.

Charles Cooley, Social Organization. N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913, pp. 29-30.

4. In such a crowd, the personal censor is removed, and the primitive or infantile nature of man reappears.

Mannheim, op. cit., p. 105.

5. The looking-glass self. . . seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of the judgment of the appearance, and some sort of self-feeling.

Cooley, Human Nature, op. cit., p. 184.

6. In abstract thought the individual takes the attitude of the generalized other toward himself.

Mead, op. cit.

(continued) to accomplish that you accepted her (the church). You took her as a means toward your own selfishness. . ."

p. 367

### Sartoris

"John at least tipped his hat to a lady on the street, but that other boy."

p. 74

Nothing is more certain than that manners, far from growing up spontaneously, early get the social sanction behind them and are forced into vogue.

E. Ross, Social Control. N.Y.: Macmillan Co., 1929, p. 249.

### Requiem for a Nun

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

p. 92

Culture is learned. Moreover, it is learned from other persons. Gradually, the culture comes to affect the individual in what he thinks, what he believes, and how he acts.

Blackman, op. cit., p. 48.

### "Knight's Gambit"

"He would have shot that man just as quick as B. did if he had been in B.'s place."

p. 105

Culture tends to identify with other people, to put themselves in the other's place.

Calhoun, et al., op. cit., Introduction to Book III.

### Soldier's Pay

"For we, the self-styled civilized peoples, are now exercised over our stomachs and sex, as were our progenitors and some of our uncompelled contemporaries."

"Uncompelled?"

"Socially, of course. Doe believes that Doe and Smith should and must do this or that."

p. 64

In the presence of one whom we feel to be of importance there is a tendency to enter into and adopt, by means, his judgment of ourself and to put a new value on ideas and purposes, to recast life in his image.

Cooley, Human Nature, op. cit., p. 206.



### Mosquitoes

It's the custom that makes the man, you know.

Man's nature, his passions, and anxieties are a cultural product. Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom. N.Y.: Farrar and Rinehart, 1941, pp. 12-13.

### Wild Palms

"We have radio in the place of God's voice."  
p. 136

Such overexposure to the advertisers' message, which is never what it seems, had to cause a confusion in the minds of young people. . . the voice of advertising has become that of the superego. Fyvel: The Troublemakers. N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1962, p. 284.

To the extent that Faulkner sees the individual personality as a cultural product he is similar in his outlook to the sociologist. He could have taken a different approach to man's behavior: that is, he could have seen it as the result of genetic endowment, extreme individualism, early childhood trauma or parent-child, superego-id conflict. The fact is that he did not, that in regard to personality and culture he took a position most closely analogous to that of the sociologist.

### CONCLUSION

The Mississippi author may not have been a trained sociologist, but there is plenty of sociology in his writings. Thus it is possible to recognize in his work a sociology of the region, of town and country life, of race relations, and of stratification. The reader can enter into all this sociology and into history, too, through imagination. In this chapter, our initial search into such insights, we have found an insurmountable amount on the subject of personality and culture alone. Yet our parallel construction consisting of a juxtaposition of the

fictional with the scientific, by no means exhausts the possibilities.

The hypothesis that has been substantiated here is that there is an unmistakable sociological ethic running throughout all Faulkner's work, that the sociological ethic is exemplified in his concept of the personality in culture, of the individual as a group product. Thus in his character construction and narration man in the family, man in the reference group, man in the crowd, and man in society have been presented. We have seen a man seeing his reflection in the faces of others, his "looking-glass self." We have seen country and townspeople reacting to Mead's "generalized other."

The sociologist, Francis Merrill has presented a defense of Balzac similar to the one of Faulkner I am attempting here; his essay concludes, "Individual and group are part of the same social process. In his vast experiment in imagination, Balzac sensed this relationship (perhaps) more clearly and (certainly) more extensively than any other novelist." After a close study of Faulkner's work on the same topic of man in the group, I would be willing to question Merrill's claim and even to make the same one on behalf of the Mississippian.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Edward Hall, The Silent Language. Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, 1963, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>A. L. Kroeber, Anthropology. N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948, p. 289.

<sup>3</sup>George Mead, Mind, Self, and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

<sup>4</sup>M. C. Elmer, Social Science, Vol. 40, No. 1 (January, 1965), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>H. J. Eysenck, Fact and Fiction in Psychology. London: Penguin Books, 1965.

<sup>6</sup>William Faulkner, quoted in F. Gwynn, et al., Faulkner in the University. Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1959, p. 84.

<sup>7</sup>Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. N.Y.: 1887.

<sup>8</sup>Ferdinand Tonnies, Fundamental Concepts of Sociology. N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957, p. 225.

<sup>9</sup>H. Becker, and A. Boskoff, Modern Sociological Theory. N.Y.: South and Haas, 1932, p. 170.

<sup>10</sup>William Faulkner, Light in August. N.Y.: South and Haas, 1932, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>12</sup>H. F. Harlow, "Primary Affectional Patterns in Primates," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 1960, Vol. 30.

<sup>13</sup>R. A. Spitz, "Anaclitic Depression," The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Vol. 2, N.Y.: International Universities' Press, 1945.

<sup>14</sup>Light in August, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>15</sup>Everett Hughes, in Mach, Raymond, Race, Class, and Power. N.Y.: American Book Company, 1963.

<sup>16</sup>William Faulkner, Absolam, Absolam! N.Y.: Random House, 1936, p. 319.

- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 221.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 283.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 84.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 21.
- <sup>21</sup>Francis Merrill, Society and Culture. N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 324.
- <sup>22</sup>Philip Slater, in Neil Smelser, Sociology. N.Y.: John Wiley and Sons, 1967, p. 554.
- <sup>23</sup>Melvin Vincent, "Regionalism and Fiction," Social Forces, Vol. 14, 1963.
- <sup>24</sup>C. Hugh Holman, "Literature and Culture, The Fugitive Agrarians," Social Forces, Vol. 37, 1958.
- <sup>25</sup>Charles Cooley, Social Organization. N.Y.: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1913, chapter 3.
- <sup>26</sup>Walter Reckless, "Self Concept as Insulator Against Delinquency," American Sociological Review, Vol. 21, 1956.
- <sup>27</sup>William Ogburn, Social Change. N.Y.: B. W. Huebsch, 1923.

CHAPTER IV  
SOCIALIZATION AND IDEOLOGY

(I)t--art--is a living quantity in our social condition. If it were not, there'd be no reason for people to delve and find all sorts of symbolisms and psychological strains and currents in it.  
William Faulkner

If it is true that culture determines to a large extent the personality attributes of the indigenous population then it would seem to follow logically that regions of a particular culture also bring their effect to bear upon personality characteristics. The effect on speech and accent of an upbringing in a particular part of the country goes without saying. And the effect on values, attitudes, traditions, child-rearing patterns, work roles is equally impressive.

One of the more distinctive regions of North America is that South of the Mason-Dixon line. The present chapter is concerned with the Southern ideology and with man's socialization into that ideology. Many attempts have been made to define the Southern ideology and with man's socialization into that ideology. Many attempts have been made to define the Southern character--geographers emphasize climate, soil, and natural resources, historians stress the heritage of slavery and the Civil War, political scientists are concerned with the monolithic political structure, and sociologists point to norms and patterns of interaction or social differentiation. The process of social differentiation in the South will therefore be the approach of the present essay.

Social differentiation is an attribute of all cultures on the basis of such variables as age, sex, social class, and race. In one culture the breakdown may be according to one trait; in another it might be on an entirely different basis. Likewise, there are many variations from region to region.

Faulkner is the novelist extraordinaire of the Southern region. The theme of Absolam, Absolam! is the theme of the South. We will consider this novel in light of what sociological studies have discovered about the area. Next the differential groupings of social class and race will each be approached separately. Discussion will be highlighted in the three instances with a tabular arrangement of excerpts from the works of William Faulkner. These will appear as Comparative Analysis II, III, IV. First, however, it would be worthwhile to provide a background in classical sociological studies in this area.

There have been a number of noteworthy attempts by social scientists to characterize the South, to grasp its essence. The question we would like to answer is, What is there about the South that makes it more than a geographical concept, more than a simple variation on the American and Western theme? Cash talks about the "essential Southern mind and will."

(I)f it can be said there are many Souths, the fact remains that there is also one South. That is to say, it is easy to trace throughout the region. . . a fairly definite mental pattern--a complex of established religions and habits of thought, sentiments, prejudices, standards and values, and association of ideas. . .<sup>1</sup>

Odum's study, The Way of the South, tells us of the organic and time quality of a state of mind he calls a folk culture. The southern folk culture is deeply embedded in factors of race and caste making the South distinct from other regions of the nation, in the cotton economy

which emerged into a colonial economy "from which it has not yet freed itself."<sup>2</sup> It is important to understand the region, says Cash, because the way of each region is the way of its culture. Regional attitudes and mores are so definite and powerful to the individual that they constitute rights and wrongs; they determine the nature of behavior and institutions.<sup>3</sup> The "culture" of the South, Odum finds as "radically different" from "culture" of the North. And the way of the South is the way of its culture.

Both The Way of the South and The Mind of the South depict the provincial loyalty of the Southern populace to their region, an identification and loyalty intensified by the havoc wrought by the Civil War, the narrow class structure in which the planter has historically felt a private contempt for common whites, in which the upper class was and is characterized by a glorification of Southern heritage, and by "the idea of rigid personal integrity in one's dealings with one's fellows and of noblesse oblige and chivalry in the widest sense."<sup>4</sup> The cult of Southern womanhood and the paternalistic pattern in Negro-white relationships is also given some attention.

To here analyze the Southern region in terms of the factors of social class and race relations, therefore, is to single out two of the most relevant dimensions. Let us begin with Absolam, Absolam!

Regionalism of the South in all its uniqueness is not only contained in the story of Absolam, Absolam! but it is the story. "Tell about the South. What It's like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there," asks the southerner's college room-mate. Then the story of the man's indomitable struggle for power which is the story of the South, of a whole culture, commences and the boys become "not two

of them in a New England sitting-room but one in a Mississippi library sixty years ago."

The narrative--it is told by four different people--can be summarized as follows: to accept it on a superficial level would be to make a travesty of a fine work of art. Thomas Sutpen as a youth has a traumatic experience, a sociologically traumatic experience. On being sent to a mansion for delivery of a message--probably because of his ill-clad appearance--he is sent around to the back door. It is then that his great design takes shape in his mind; he will go to the West Indies, get rich by any means necessary, return and build himself a fabulous plantation.

The account of Sutpen's rise to power, a ruthless one, indeed, is the examination of the general malaise which had its origin in slavery and which still afflicts the South today. In the first scene which is set in 1908, we get this happy description:

The deep South head since 1865 and peopled with  
garrulous outraged baffled ghosts.

The downfall of the South, we learn, was only immediately precipitated by the Civil War. The true moral responsibility for the destruction goes to people who like Sutpen failed to recognize the individualities ("the I-Am") of others. So it was the institution of slavery, then, as man's hubris which had to be expiated. The adolescent-narrator, Quentin, ponders "that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth."

Sutpen achieves his design on schedule, but in his very desperation to avoid failure, he brings about a far greater failure than the one he seeks to avoid. When, on learning they carry Negro blood, he rejects



his West Indian wife and denies his son, he sets himself on a cataclysmic course. His son, whose existence cannot permanently be denied, matures with a design of his own. Not only does he cultivate the friendship of his unaware brother but he further proposes to the boy's (and of course his) sister! Sutpen, making the next move, in a despair both real and studied, goads the one son into murdering the other. The reason for the foul play--the author does not equivocate at this point--is the "miscegenation, not the incest."

Throughout the course of his long and sometimes involuted narration, with the help of his Canadian room-mate, Quentin comes to grasp more and more the essence of the South. At last he declares, "I am older at twenty than a lot of people who have died." And in a state of awareness that is regret (one thinks of Ibsen's Hialmar--"The Wild Duck") to erase a truth that is a past, he commits suicide.

Quentin's and Sutpen's problems are rooted deep in their childhood experiences, in the society of Jefferson, its structure mounted upon "injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame." Faulkner's people can never escape their heritage ("Yesterday today and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible: One") and their heritage here is at its inception Southern. Accordingly, Faulkner is considered the greatest of the American regional writers.<sup>5</sup>

Comparative Analysis II presents quotations juxtaposing some of the novelist's comments on the South with those made by social scientists.

THE SOUTH AS A REGION, SUI GENERIS

Sociological orientations of  
William Faulkner

Sociological orientations of social  
scientists

Absolam, Absolam!

1. Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the war came and made the ladies into ghosts.

p. 12

2. "What creature in the South since 1861, man, nigger, or mule, had had time or opportunity not only to have been young, but to have heard what being young was like from those who had."

p. 18

3. ". . .it was as if God or the devil had taken advantage of his (Sutpen's) very vices in order to supply witnesses to the discharge of our curse not only among gentle folks, our own kind, but from the very scum and riffraff who could not have approached the house itself under any other circumstances, not even from the rear."

p. 28

4. "(the world today) would be too much for it, for them. Yes, for them: of that day and time, of a dead time; people too as we are, but victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic and the figures therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex.

5. ". . .the War and its heritage of suffering and injustice and sorrow.

p. 159

1. For good or ill, calamities are unquestionably the supreme disruptors and transformers of social organization and institutions.

Pitirim Sorokin, Man and Society in Calamity. N.Y.: Greenwood Press, 1968, p. 121.

2. They learned to accept with stoic fatalism and resign the misfortune entailed in being Southern.

Alfred Hero, The Southerner in World Affairs. Baton Rouge: L. S.U. Press, 1965, p. 342.

3. Not only did the region fail to gain its independence but it was laid waste; its economy and social system were overturned.

Ibid., p. 342.

4. The Civil War was the first great crisis which disturbed this almost feudal way of life and the landed upper class still speaks with evident nostalgia of "The Past."

Allison Davis, et al., Deep South. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944, p. 255.

5. In the South the traumatic experience of Civil War, invasion, defeat, emancipation and reconstruction had profound and. . .effects.

C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow. London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 22.

6. "Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it. It's better than the theatre, isn't it. It's better than Ben Hur isn't it."

p. 378

7. "Why do you hate the South?"  
 . . .I don't I don't! I don't hate it!"

6. (S)o far as social scientists are concerned there is something unique about the Deep South.

Everett Hughes in Robert Highsaw, The Deep South in Transition. University of Alabama Press, 1964, p. 78.

7. "Ambivalence may be considered the keystone of individual motivation. We can never be totally. . . absorbed in a single feeling toward a person, an object, or a goal.

Philip Slater in Smelser, Sociology: An Introduction. N.Y.: Wiley and Sons, 1967, p. 572.

### New Orleans Sketches

These people in the South aint got the pep we have at all.

p. 61

Hippocrites insisted that to develop vigor and bravery a climate is needed which would exert the mind, ruffle the temple and demand fortitude and exertion.

Elmer Pendell, Society under Analysis. Pa: Jacques Cattell Press, 1942, p. 86.

### Intruder in the Dust

1. ". . .we in the South are homogeneous people, the only one of any size in the U. S."

(uncle) p. 152

1. This absence of intercultural experience is probably responsible to a considerable extent for the rather homogeneous thinking.

Hero, op. cit., p. 61.

2. We are defending not actually our politics or beliefs or even our way of life but simply our homogeneity from a federal government to which in simple desperation the rest of this country has had to surrender voluntarily more and more of its personal and private liberty.

p. 153

2. . . .there is a tendency to look at the past as a period of halycon amity and to view conflict and resentment as resulting from outside disturbances of the earlier normal equilibrium.

Berreman, "Caste in India and the United States," in Mach, Race, Class, and Power. N.Y.: American Book Co., 1963.

### The Town

Because ours was a town founded by Aryan Baptists and Methodists.

p. 306

This absence of intercultural experience. . .

Hero, op. cit., p. 59.

Light in August

1. She has lived in the house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction.

p. 37

2. (She is) a Yankee, a lover of Negroes, about whom in the town there is still talk of queer relations with Negroes in the town and out of it. . .

p. 42

3. But the town did not believe that the ladies had forgot those previous mysterious trips with Memphis as their destination and for that purpose regarding which all had the same conviction.

p. 51

1. Each ethnocentric group nourishes its own people and vanity, its superiority, exalts its own divinities and looks with contempt on outsiders.

Karl Mannheim, Systematic Sociology. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1957, p. 47.

2. Many rumors circulate in Southern towns about the queer and obnoxious attitudes of northern people.

John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town. N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1949, p. 44.

3. (I)n a small town when some more scandal has just been committed (t)hey stop each other on the street . . .there emerges a unique temper . . .which is everybody's without being anybody's in particular. This is the public temper.

Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1947, p. 102.

Sartoris

"Do you think a man could sit day after day and month after month in a house miles from nowhere and spend the time between casualty lists tearing up bedclothes. . .

p. 53

Now the South inherited and built heavily upon the doctrine of work. If a man would not work, neither should he eat. This was the fundamental doctrine of the southern folk that the shiftless people who came to be called poor whites were the very symbol of what ought not to be.

Howard Odum, The Way of the South. N.Y.: Macmillan Co., 1947, p. 82.

As I Lay Dying

I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready for a long time dead.

p. 461

Southerners have been more apt than Northerners to advance pessimistic thinking.

Hero, op. cit., p. 344.

### Soldier's Pay

Aunt Callie has raised more children than I could count.  
p. 259

A large part of the training of the child devolves upon Negro servants.  
Davis, op. cit., p. 91.

Part of the "way of the South" is the highly developed local system of ranking, the marked differentials in wealth, income, power, and attitudes among the various social levels. Characteristic of this entrenched pattern is the heavy weight given to lineal principles to membership in the right family, to inherited wealth and position, to long residence in the community, and to such symbols of status as manners, education, and place of residence.<sup>6</sup>

Whether or not a person occupies a subordinate or superordinate position is determined by the criteria of stratification in a given society; the divisions of social class and race are two such categories of ranking universal in most cultures, but especially pronounced in the Deep South, U. S. A.

Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, is a land of rigid stratification where sharp lines are drawn between planter and yeomen farmer, newcomers and well established families, man of old wealth and the nouveau riche, where who you are is determined by who your people were before you.

Social mobility, down and up, and the consequent effect on personality, will be one of the major concerns of the following chapter, one of the topics under the heading, Occupational Differentiation. The present discussion will concentrate on social divisions on a larger scale.

The major characters in Faulkner's novels are drawn from three social levels: the country people, the aristocrats, and the Negroes.<sup>7</sup>

The rural people tend to be simple, kindly, working hard just to obtain the necessities of life. The Burdens of As I Lay Dying embody these traits. Their struggle for existence is a harsh and unrewarding one; they are easy prey for the unscrupulousness of crafty strangers.

Some of Faulkner's most significant characters are young people. These adolescents come predominantly from aristocratic families. The theme of their adjustment or lack of adjustment to the narrow and archaic upper class outlook is one of the refrains recurring throughout the collection of stories.<sup>8</sup>

The novels invariably cover periods of eighty to one hundred years. Past and present are juxtaposed, the modern town of Jefferson is seen against the backdrop of the Civil War. Each new generation is "filled" with tales of the early pioneering adventures of their ancestors, and each upcoming generation is socialized into the mores of his social class. The past is glamorized to an unrealistic extent. The young protagonist's fascination with his legendary progenitors and his indoctrination into the chivalric code make it hard for him to cope with the harsh world of reality.

Part of what the author seems to be saying can be summed up as follows: that the atmosphere is tense with the memory of the antebellum pattern of social rigidity and oppression, a memory as false as it is romantic, that the slave-cotton economy produced culture traits and sentiments manifest today in opinions on class and race. Faulkner's characters meet personal disasters in the present because they cannot come to terms with the past, because they persist in an inflexible and an outmoded pattern of behavior.

Some of Faulkner's people, nevertheless, find happiness by getting above the petty restrictions of civilized life, by getting in "harmony with nature." This is the point of his seemingly unprofound hunting stories. "The Bear" is the allegory of white man shaking off the shackles of his grim upper class heritage--he removes watch, compass, and gun, symbolically--to explore the wilderness where class distinctions are abandoned and man is free to pursue his own destiny.

Not many of Faulkner's men and women, though, are able to find such an even temporary sanctuary from the debilitating small town experience. The social differentials at work in and around the community of Jefferson can be best observed through a direct reading of some of the most meaningful comments made by and about townfolk. The immediate side-by-side comparison of Faulkner's works with those of the sociologists is indicative of the fact that the Yoknapatawpha chronicle is intimately related to the milieu from which it was derived.

#### SOCIAL CLASS

##### Sociological orientations of William Faulkner

##### Absolam, Absolam!

1. "He wasn't a gentleman. . . He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name which nobody ever heard before."

p. 14

2. "Then he needed respectability, the shield of a virtuous woman."

p. 15

##### Sociological orientations of social scientists

1. Southerners have been much more concerned with traditions of the past than most other Americans.

Hero, op. cit., p. 342.

2. Men may change their occupational status by changing their job but they can improve their social-class position only by being admitted to relationships of intimacy with those who already possess a high rank.

(continued)

(continued) Melvin Tumin, Social Stratification. N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967, p. 275.

3. ". . .what there could have been besides the common civility of two men meeting on the street between a man who came from nowhere and dared not tell where and our father. . .papa--a Methodist steward, a merchant who. . .never drank nor hunted nor gambled."

p. 20

4. "Even I used to wonder what our father or his father could have done before he married our mother that Ellen and I would have to expiate. . .what crime committed that would leave our family cursed to be the instruments not only for that man's destruction, but for our own."

p. 21

5. ". . .those eyes hard and pale and reckless and probably quizzical and maybe contemptuous even then."

p. 45

6. "Yes, he was underbred. It showed like this always, your grandfather said, in all his formal contacts with people."

7. ". . .(the aunt)--one of that league of Jefferson women who on the second day after the town saw him five years ago, had agreed never to forgive him for not having any past."

p. 52

8. . . .He was not liked (which he evidently did not want, anyway) but feared.

p. 72

3. With persons of this out group, "we: members of the in group, do not have anything in common."

Pendell, op. cit., p. 256.

4. A modern cultural region in which one class could not mingle socially with another, or recognize its existence socially. . .could not thrive in that form.

Odum, op. cit., p. 143.

5. He (man) achieves the emotional satisfaction that was denied him in his parental family by attaining success and manipulating other people.

Francis Merrill, Society and Culture. N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961, p. 324.

6. The lower class person is not aware of many of the niceties of manners and etiquette that are part of the expected behavior of middle- and upper-class people.

Ibid., p. 91.

7. Southerners have been much more concerned with traditions of the past than most other Americans.

Hero, op. cit., p. 342.

8. In their efforts to get ahead . . .they may become neurotic, alcoholic, or overly aggressive.

Merrill, op. cit., p. 323.



9. (He assumed) a role of arrogant ease and leisure which, as leisure and ease put flesh on him became a little pompous.

p. 72

10. Jones who before sixty-one had not even been allowed to approach the front of the house.

p. 183

11. . . .the nigger told him (the boy). . .never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back. . .he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself the rest of his life.

p. 234

12. . . .and when it (the inner voice) said them instead of her or him it meant more than all the human puny mortals under the sun that might be in hammocks all afternoon with their shoes off.

p. 238

13. All his time for spare talking taken up with furthering that design which he had in mind, and the only relaxation fighting his wild niggers in the stable.

p. 259

14. ". . .out of ignorance of gentility in dealing with gentleborn people."

p. 264

15. "Well, Milly," Sutpen said, "too bad you are not a mare. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable."

p. 286

16. "I am older at twenty than a lot of people who have died," Quentin said.

p. 377

9. Occupational mobility is not the same as social mobility, any more than occupation is exactly equal to what is meant by class.

Leonard Reissman, Class in American Society. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1959, p. 299.

10. In the social organization of the Deep South, there seems to be . . .a class hierarchy.

Davis, op. cit., p. 324.

11. The search for status through occupational mobility may thus result from anxiety produced by an unhappy childhood experience.

Merrill, op. cit., p. 324.

12. The image of the dichotomy "they" and "we," those who command and those who obey.

Raymond Aron, Progress and Disillusion. N.Y.: New American Library, 1968, p. 70.

13. Whether successful or not in their drive for status, many such persons are unpleasant, inadequate parents, and unsatisfactory friends.

Merrill, op. cit., p. 323.

14. Our very modes of communication . . .differ from class to class.

Vance Packard, The Status Seekers. N.Y.: Pocket Books, Inc., 1965, p. 125.

15. The Real Lower Class. These are the people everyone looks down on.

Packard, p. 36.

16. ". . .the upper class preoccupation with lineage. It may be said that an upper class person is primarily a member of a group and only secondarily and individual."

Davis, op. cit., p. 75.

### The Mansion

1. He, Mink, wasn't religious.  
p. 5

2. He didn't own this land: he referred of course to the renter's or cropper's share of what it made. . . Now. . . he had suddenly discovered something. People of his kind never had owned even temporarily the land which they had rented between one New Year's and the next one. It was the land itself which owned them.

p. 91

3. "Because Colonel Sartoris had been born into money and respectability too, and Manfred de Spain had been born into respectability at least even if he had made a heap of the money since. But he, Flem Snopes, had had to earn both of them, snatch and tear and scrabble them out of the hard enduring resisting rock. . . So the house (that) the folks owning the money would see Manfred de Spain walk into ever evening. . . wouldn't be enough for Flem Snopes."

p. 153

### The Sound and the Fury

1. Jason III. Bred for lawyer, drank and wrote poetry in his office.

p. vi

2. White folks gives a nigger money because they know the first white man comes along with a band going to get it all back, so nigger can go to work for some more.

p. 35

1. They (lower class people) are seldom religious in the sense of the lower-middle class.

Alvin Bertrand, Basic Sociology.  
N.Y.: Meredith Publishing Co.,  
1967, p. 185.

2. Wage-workers in the factory and on the farm are on the propertyless bottom of the occupational structure, depending upon the equipment owned by others, earning wages for the time they spend at work.

C. Wright Mills, Power, Politics, and People. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 308.

3. The best statistical chance of becoming a member of the business elite is to be born into it.

Mills, op. cit., p. 143.

1. Personal opportunities (or the lack of them) are still largely (although not entirely) determined by accident of birth.

Merrill, op. cit., p. 282.

2. Their (the underdog's) view of those who have been successfully mobile is likely to be jaundiced and defensive.

Smelser, et al., in Seymour Lipset, Social Structure and Mobility in Economic Development. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1966.

3. "Do you want to poison him with that cheap store cake," Mother said.

p. 79

4. "My people are every bit as well born as yours. Just because Maury's health is bad."

p. 63

5. "You know I'm ill, yet you . . .", "What is it now. Can't I even be sick in peace. . .I'll be gone soon."

Mother pp. 60 and 78

6. "How can I control any of them when you have always taught them to have no respect for me and my wishes I know you look down on my people but is that any reason. . ."

p. 115

7. I thought that Benjamin was punishment for any sins I have committed. I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me...I see now I must pay for your sins as well as my own what have you done what sins have you high and mighty people visited upon me.

Mother p. 120

8. "Do you think so because of one of our forefathers was a governor and there were generals and Mother's weren't."

p. 121

9. "Saturday wouldn't mean nothing to you either," I says, "if it depended on me to pay you wages."

p. 183

3. Upper class housewives seem to look with distaste upon serving prepared foods.

Thomas Lasswell, Class and Stratum. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965, p. 248.

4. Rationalization is. . .(a) way of escaping conflicts.

Mannheim, op. cit., p. 20.

5. Mobile individuals whatever the direction of their mobility, are more apt to be preoccupied with their health than non-mobile ones.

Peter Blau, "Social Mobility," A.S.R., (June 1956).

6. For the downwardly mobile social insecurity exerts pressures that increase. . .status consciousness and family identification.

Blau, op. cit., p. 295.

7. (T)he upwardly as well as downwardly mobile are more troubled by nervousness than the non-mobile and they are also more prone to become mentally ill.

Blau, op. cit., p. 291.

8. (T)he upper class preoccupation with lineage. It may be said that an upper class person is primarily a member of a group and is only secondarily an individual.

Davis, op. cit., p. 75.

9. The worker who goes down in the socio-economic scale maintains a strong belief in the economic order and the class structure that has arisen about it.

Merrill, op. cit., p. 183.

10. What this country needs is white labor. Let these damn trifling niggers starve for a couple of years, then they'd see what a soft thing they have.

Ibid.

11. "I don't need any man's mahogany desk to prop me up."

p. 229

12. "I don't know, you haven't had the chance the others, that you've had to bury yourself in a little country store."

p. 239

13. I don't see how a city no bigger than New York can hold enough people to take the money away from us country suckers. Work like hell all day every day, send them your money and get a little piece of paper back.

p. 251

14. I says my people owned slaves here when you all were running little shirt tail country stores and farming land no nigger would look at on shares.

p. 256

10. A study of the worker who loses status, indeed, indicated that he is more conservative in many respects than the one who keeps his status.

Ibid.

11. Desks typically are categorized by rank. Mahogany, of course, outranks walnut, and walnut outranks oak.

Packard, op. cit., p. 103.

12. Education exerts the strongest direct effect on occupational achievements.

Peter Blau and Otis Duncan, American Occupational Structure. N.Y.: Wiley and Co., 1967, pp. 402-403.

13. (I)n the view of the white-collar employee, the aim of the business is to make a profit if it is using the employee to enable it to do so.

Mills, op. cit., p. 143.

14. (The upper class) are content that individuals in their lineal-kin group were the original wealthy planters, and so the "aristocracy," in the local community.

Davis, op. cit., p. 84.

### Intruder in the Dust

1. "I ain't a Edmonds. I don't blong to these new folks. I belongs to the old lot. I'm a McCaslin."

p. 19

2. ". . . pine hills dotted meagerly with small tilted farms and peripatetic sawmills and contraband whiskey--kettles where peace officers from town didn't even go and unless they were sent for and strange white men didn't even go and no Negro at any time."

p. 35

1. Newer, wealthier families have tended to be looked down upon. . . and Negroes have seemed to accept the judgment. . . to a degree.

Hero, op. cit., p. 275.

2. The lower-lowers. . . have a conscious, thorough disregard for the laws of the community.

Davis, op. cit., p. 80.

3. "But then I'm a farming man  
and you're a lawing man."  
p. 245

3. . . .people depend upon a class  
label in order to categorize others  
and thereby to style their own re-  
sponses to others. For example, a  
man's occupation has become his  
symbol of distinctiveness.

Reisman, op. cit., p. 228.

### The Town

1. That same kind of osmosis by  
which, according to Ratcliff, they  
had covered every Snopes in  
Frenchman's Bend, the chairs un-  
broken, every Snopes in French-  
man's Bend moving up one step,  
leaving that last slot at the bot-  
tom open for the next Snopes to  
appear from nowhere to fill.

p. 8

1. Such wholesale invasions have  
caused the old guards in many com-  
munities to react by emphasizing  
the importance of ancestry.

Packard, op. cit., p. 43.

2. ". . .we all in our country,  
even half a century after, senti-  
mentalize the heroes of our gal-  
lant lost irrevocable unrecon-  
structible debacle, and those heroes  
were indeed ours because they were  
our fathers and grandfathers and  
uncles and great-uncles."

p. 42

2. Upper class individuals think of  
class divisions largely in terms of  
time.

Davis, op. cit., p. 72.

3. "They--the Bryon Society and  
the Cortilleean Clug, both when pos-  
sible of course though either alone  
in a pinch--seemed to be the mea-  
sure."

p. 51

3. A method of showing reverence  
for the past is to become a member  
of the local Historical Club.

Davis, p. 194.

4. But this time we didn't know  
him. He still wore the little bow  
tie and his jaw was still pulsing  
faintly and steadily, but now he  
wore a hat, a new one of the broad  
black felt kind which country  
preachers and politicians wore.

p. 138

4. The upwardly mobile individuals  
internalize the organizations'  
values.

Ibid., p. 45.

5. . . .the street leading to the  
back street leading to the renting  
house where Flem lived, who had no  
office nor other place of business.

p. 148

5. The importance of neighborhood  
as an indication of class status.

Packard, op. cit., p. 70.

6. "You started out as clerk in a country store. Then you moved to town and ran a cafe. Now you're vice president of your bank."

p. 222

7. "I can take this piece here and make it look still older." And Flem said, "Why?" and the man said, "For background."

p. 222

8. (S)he used to sleep in or anyway pass most or at least part of the night in. Because the rest of the time she was either on the South of the streets of Jefferson or somewhere on the mile-and-a-half road between town and the poorhouse.

9. "what?" I said. "what is it he's got to have?"

"Respectability," Ratcliff said.

"Respectability?"

"That's it. . .when it's just money and power a man wants, there is usually some place where he will stop. . .But when it's respectability. . ."

p. 259

10. ". . .from that very first day when he realized that he himself had nothing and would never have more than nothing unless he wrested it himself from the environment and time, and that the only weapon he would have to do it with would be just money."

p. 263

11. "(The old order would run the bank) decently, with decorum, as they had done and would do: not reaved like a boy snatching a handful of loose peanuts while the back was turned."

p. 265

6. Vertical mobility in the American South is accomplished by most people through the proper use of certain recognized sources of social power, the principal ones being occupation, education, talent.

W. Lloyd Warner, American Life.  
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 132.

7. This buying of antiques and period furniture may be an effort to buy something more valuable as a social than as a material object.

Warner, American Life, op. cit., p. 120.

8. Being poor in American society today generally means that people are committed to poverty because there are few, if any, channels open to them to accept.

Reissman in Smelser, Op. cit., p. 236.

9. (T)he mere possession of money is insufficient for gaining and keeping a higher social position.

Warner, op. cit., p. 121.

10. The hostile class environment in which they have to learn the new modes often makes it quite impossible for them ever to behave freely and easily.

Warner, op. cit., p. 118.

11. The extreme emphasis upon accumulation of wealth as a symbol of success in our society militates against the completely effective control of. . .modes of acquiring (continued)

(continued) a fortune.

Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," A.S.R., 1938, pp. 672, 682.

12. "(Flem brought a car) presently, after the polite amount of time after he turned up president of the bank. . . It wasn't a expensive car! jest a good one, jest the right unnoticeable size and a good polite unnoticeable color."

p. 352

12. If they are too open and direct in their status, they are likely to be branded as social climbers.

Warner, op. cit., p. 134.

### Sartoris

1. The stairway with its white spindles and red carpet mounted in a tall slender curve into upper gloom. From the center of the ceiling hung a chandelier of crystal prisms and shades.

p. 7

1. . . .visible signs of culture have their value in conveying the impression of high status.

Packard, op. cit., p. 62.

2. It was she (the old woman) who told them of the manner of Bayard Sartoris' death prior to the second battle of Manassas. She had told the story many times since.

p. 9

2. A very old woman may be said to be a symbol of the upper-upper class as a group.

Davis, p. 89.

3. Old Bayard sat for a long time, regarding the start dissolving apotheosis of his name.

p. 92

3. . . .the downwardly mobile. . . .

Peter Blau, op. cit., p. 292.

### As I Lay Dying

1. "If I'd crossed it every time your wife littered since, it'd a been wore out long before this, Billy."

p. 401

1. With Americans, choice of words is more indicative of status than accent.

Packard, p. 123.

2. Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hard-working man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats.

p. 414

2. The institution of property is so shaped as to permit a slanting exploitation under which a class is able to live in idleness by monopolizing and other indispensable natural means of production.

E. A. Ross, Social Control. N.Y.: MacMillan Co., 1929, p. 377.

3. "God knows it. He knows in fifteen years I ain't et the victuals He aimed for man to eat to keep his strength up."

p. 479

4. "Working his brain it's like a piece of machinery, it won't stand a whole lot of racking. It's best when it runs along the same, doing the day's work and not no one part used no more than needful."

p. 389

3. The goal of persons in the lowest class is to survive, to hang on for a few more days or weeks.

Lasswell, op. cit., p. 278.

4. Working class life as a whole emphasizes the concrete and immediate.

Seymour Lipset, "Working Class Authoritarianism," in Petersen, Social Controversy. California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1963, p. 251.

### "Percy Grimm"

"Granny had told us a long time ago never to let Ab Snopes go anywhere about the house unless somebody was with him. She said she would rather have Yankees in the house anyday because at least Yankees would have more delicacy. . . than to steel a spoon or candlestick and then try to sell it to one of her own neighbors."

p. 674

Newer, wealthier families have tended to be looked down upon by the less affluent gentry in the traditional sections of the South.

Hero, op. cit., p. 275.

### "A Big Hunt" in Big Woods

We were children, it is true, yet we were descendants of people who read books.

p. 149

The upper class group. . . are, of course, likely to be more traveled, better read (etc.). . .

Dollard, op. cit., p. 82.

### "Knight's Gambit"

"You know Arse never saved a nickel in his life."

p. 7

They (the lower class) find it impossible to provide for the future since immediate needs are so rarely satisfied.

Davis, op. cit., p. 81.

### Soldier's Pay

"(Providence) enables man to rise and till the soil, so that he might eat. Would he, do you think rise and labor if he could remain (continued)

(Man's) labor is. . . not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. Morris Stockhammer, Karl Marx Dictionary. N.Y.: Philadelphia (continued)



(continued) comfortably supine  
over long?"

pp. 63-64

(continued) Library, 1965, p. 6.

### Wild Palms

Me and Buck wasn't married for  
a while either.

p. 79

By and large, lower class behavior and ideology may be said to be characterized by a disdain for all the values of higher classes.

Davis, p. 80.

### Mosquitoes

1. "It's the old problem of the aristocracy over and over; a natural envy of that minority which is at liberty to commit all the sins which the majority cannot stop earning a living long enough to commit."

p. 229

1. In the same sense of: (a) a differential prestige; (b) differential life-styles, and (c) tacit self-ranking the United States is a "class organized" society, whether we admit it or not.

Merrill, op. cit., p. 285.

2. "You mean. . .that having been born an American of a provincial midwestern lower middle class family, he has inherited all the lower middle class's awe of Education with a capital E."

p. 241

2. Often in the fact of economic reverses the middle class families will cling bitterly to their class standards one of which is education for their children."

Dollard, op. cit., p. 77.

3. "Maurier was not yet accepted by the Noblesse. But you can't ignore money; you can only protest."

p. 325

3. Those who acquire the money, superior occupation (etc.) must transfer it into either highly valued symbols and behavior acceptable to the superior levels.

Warner, op. cit., p. 133.

Much simpler than Absolam, Absolam!, the novel, Intruder in the Dust, is the one Faulkner recommended to the novice of his works. It is both a murder mystery and a commentary on race relations. When a Negro, Lucas Beauchamp, is found standing over the body of a dead white man with a loaded pistol in his hand he is charged with the murder. Actually, the accused has been tricked by Crawford Gourne into firing at a stump immediately before the crime was committed.

Lucas is a proud old Negro, a farmer with some upper class white blood in him. The white community regards him, probably correctly, as lacking respect, "We got to make him be a nigger first. He's got to admit he's a nigger." Intruder in the Dust is the story of a man "who would die not because he was a murderer but because his skin was black." It is also the story of an adolescent boy who having gained a sudden perspective on his society, embarks on a midnight journey to inspect the body of the murdered man and so help his Negro friend.

This land was a desert and a witness, this empty road its postulate (it would be sometime yet before he would realize how far he had come; a provincial Mississippian, the child who when the sun set this same day had appeared to be. . .still a swaddled unwitting infant in the long tradition of his native land). . .(postulate) of the deliberate turning as with one back of the whole dark people on which the very economy of the land itself was founded not in heat or anger nor even regret but in one irremediable invincible inflexible repudiation, upon not a racial outrage but a human shame.

p. 76

The boy's uncle who had taken Lucas' case discusses his racial views at great length. He is all words but no action. Many critics have assumed Gavin Stevens was expressing Faulkner's views and therefore that accordingly, branded Faulkner a racist. Gavin's basic point is that the South must free the Negroes itself without outside interference, without mandatory legislation.

We are defending not actually our politics or beliefs or even our way of life but simply our homogeneity from a federal government to which in simple desperation the rest of this country has had to surrender voluntarily more and more of its personal and private liberty in order to continue to afford the United States. . .the postulate that Sambo is a human being living in a free country and must be free. That's what we are really defending, the privilege of setting him free ourselves.

pp. 153-154

In the end, it is the Negro who has taught the White Man the lesson herein.

Though written in 1948 and though it outraged bigots and progressives alike, Intruder in the Dust has a topical relevance to the civil rights struggle in the deep South. We see here as in Cash, white and Negro trapped in a stifling social, physical, and psychological environment. This is a novel which debates a relevant issue, one which the author, as a native Southerner could not get away from. His characters-- a Negro who refuses to accept the obsequious role allotted to him, an erudite lawyer who utters empty rhetoric, a child who cuts through the verbage of his elders to listen to the Negro and ultimately to save him, and always looming sharklike in the background the working class mob eager for the lynching--illustrate the complexity of the color problem. Each individual or group serves to represent one facet of the race question, one particular variety of social attitude.

A selection from Faulkner's most relevant comments on race and racism are presented in Comparative Analysis IV as follows.

#### RACE RELATIONS

Sociological orientations of  
William Faulkner

Sociological orientations of social  
scientists

#### Absolam, Absolam!

1. "We whipped one of Pellebone's  
niggers tonight."  
p. 231

1. At bottom a system of discrimination that offers relatively few gratifications to a minority group rests upon forces or the threat of force. Ely Chinoy, Society, An Introduction to Sociology. N.Y.: Random House, 1961, p. 175.

2. . . .thinking maybe that's all I want. He need not even acknowledge me; I will let him understand just as quickly. . . .that I do not expect that, I will not be hurt by that, just as he will let me know that quickly that I am his son.

p. 319

3. "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can't bear."

p. 356

2. Kinship across caste lines is not recognized sociologically by white families in most respects.

Davis, op. cit., p. 406.

3. (Judging) from this interview . . .the incest situation was viewed with less horror than infraction of the caste sex taboos.

Ibid., p. 30.

### The Sound and the Fury

1. ". . .these damn trifling niggers. . .a bunch of damn eastern jews. . ."

Jason p. 209

1. Specifically, mobile (up or down) persons are more likely than non-mobile ones to feel that various minorities are getting too much power and to stereotype Jews as dishonest and Negroes as lazy and ignorant.

Blau, op. cit., p. 291.

2. Like I saw the only place for them is in the field, where they'd have to work from sunup to sundown. They cant stand prosperity or an easy job.

p. 256

2. In a word, no matter what the Negro does, he is seen first of all as a Negro, and only secondarily as the perpetrator of the deed. This is stereotyping.

Mach, op. cit., p. 21.

### Intruder in the Dust

1. He had smelled forever, he would smell it always. . . .it was a rich part of his heritage as a Southerner.

p. 11

1. . . .the common assumption that Negroes are unclean.

Davis, op. cit., p. 16.

2. "A bare worn quite clean paintless rugless floor in one corner and spread with a bright patchwork quilt a vast shadowy tester bed which had probably come out of old C. McCaslin's house, and a battered cheap Grand Rapids dresser.

p. 19

2. The mass of Negro homes in the town seem bare and poorly furnished.

Dollard, op. cit., p. 103.

3. ". . .the rules: the nigger acting like a nigger and the white folks acting like white folks and no real hard feelings on either side."

p. 48

4. He's a Negro and your uncle's a man.

p. 72

5. ". . .a man who would die not because he was a murderer but because his skin was black."

p. 72

#### Light in August

1. "(T)hat evening some men, not masked either, took the negro man out and whipped him. And when Hightower waked the next morning his study window was broken and on the floor lay a brick with a note tied to it, commanding him to get out of town by sunset and signed K.K.K."

p. 56

2. Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a Negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; now he fought the negro who called him white.

p. 169

3. "Murdering a white woman the black son of a None of them had even entered the house. While she was alive they would not have allowed their wives to call on her."

p. 219

4. "I ain't a nigger," and the nigger says, "You are worse than that. You don't know what you (continued)

3. The Negro must haul down his social expectations and resign himself to a relative immobility in contrast to the dominant spirit of our society.

Ibid., p. 65.

4. A common pattern used to obscure the actual functioning of the caste situation is the idea that the Negro is a mere animal.

Ibid., p. 369.

5. Infringement by a Negro of any of these (mores) is punished by death, whipping, (etc.).

Allison Davis in Mach, op. cit., p. 321.

1. One may suddenly be put outside the protection of legal process and exposed to the unpatterned hatreds and revenge tendencies of a mob.

Dollard, op. cit., p. 331.

2. The Negro who passes as white no longer presents any contradiction to the eye of others, but he still has the inner dilemma.

Everett Hughes, op. cit., p. 292.

3. Any Negro man who makes advances toward a white woman, even though she be a professional prostitute, has broken the strongest taboo of the system.

Davis, op. cit., p. 23

4. A marginal man is on the periphery of two different cultures, but neither integrated into nor accepted (continued)

(continued) are. And more than  
that, you wont ever know."  
p. 228

(continued) by either one.  
Everett Hughes, op. cit., p. 287.

### Sartoris

"War done changed all dat. If us cullered folks is good enough to save France fum de Germans, den us is good enough ter have de same rights de Germans is."  
p. 62

(In calamity) the old loyalties and social ties are either transferred or destroyed.  
Sorokin, op. cit., p. 120.

### "Percy Grimm"

(He held) a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men.  
p. 292

Ethnocentrism is the technical name for this view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. . . Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior.  
W. G. Sumner, Folkways. Boston, 1906, p. 12.

In discussing the Southern ethos in relation to these regional themes and ideas in selected local works of literature, to what Faulkner calls "a living quantity in our social condition," it may appear that the themes (the ones in Absolam, Absolam! and Intruder in the Dust, for example) do not occur simultaneously. Actually, each cycle: the one about the Southern people as victims of history, the one about the planters and their descendants, and the one about the Negroes are all interwoven and interconnected. All the Yoknapatawpha novels are, in one way or another, elaborations of the same sociological truths.

Faulkner's South is the same one analyzed by Becker. Studies by sociologists on the Deep South, he says, "show (that there is) a high degree of inability or unwillingness to change, and this manifestation of sacredness as primarily of folk rather than of prescribed derivation.

The folk culture is here characterized as one where the inhabitants are mentally, vicinally, and socially isolated and demonstrate a startling uniformity and a marked disapproval of the stranger."<sup>9</sup> Faulkner's South is a depiction in less direct terms of the folk phenomenon--or should we say syndrome? Again the indigenous racial matrix delineated by the social scientists (Berrelman, "Caste in India and the United States," Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town, Mach, Race, Class and Power) and by William Faulkner are one and the same. Here we find a system of privilege, on the one hand, and sharp curtailment of human rights and ambition on the other, so that no matter what the Negro does he is seen first of all as a Negro. Any change or any thought of change is fought off with a determination that approaches fury.

The stories of Faulkner, all of them one story, reflect the Southern ethos of which the author is both onlooker and a part. In recording what he has seen and known, in the keenness of his memory and observation, they, his findings, coincide with the sociologists' so that concentrating on the substance of the novel (plot, character, dialogue) we are able to portray the artist as sociologist.

In the only available sociological analysis of William Faulkner of its kind, Joe Shaw discusses the personality type molded by a regional culture and mirrored in the works of Faulkner. "His special genius lies in the irresistible necessity he felt to tell of this South, its people and its ways, the symbolism of this telling, and what many consider the consummate artistry and skill with which he was able to do it."<sup>10</sup>

Let me close by concurring with Melvin Vincent, writing on regionalism and fiction in Social Forces that a fine artist works within the regional and that inasmuch as knowledge of the region is important in

any study of society, the regional sociologist cannot afford to ignore the materials in novels of and about distinctive parts of this country.<sup>11</sup>



#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South. New York: Vintage Books, 1960, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup>Howard Odum, The Way of the South. New York: Macmillan Co., 1947, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>4</sup>Cash, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>5</sup>Edmond Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1964, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>Robin Williams, American Society: A Sociological Interpretation. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1951, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup>Volpe, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup>Volpe lists Faulkner's similar adolescents as Quentin Compson, (The Sound and the Fury), Bayard Sartoris II (The Unvanquished), Ike McCaslin (Go Down, Moses), Charles Mallison, (Intruder in the Dust), and Lucius Priest, (The Reivers).

<sup>9</sup>Howard Becker, Through Values to Social Interpretation. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup>Joe Shaw, "Sociological Aspects of Faulkner's Writing," Mississippi Quarterly, Vol. 14, 1961, pp. 148-152.

<sup>11</sup>Melvin Vincent, "Regionalism and Fiction," Social Forces, Vol. 14, 1936, p. 336.

CHAPTER V  
IDEOLOGY AND WORK

The differences between different peoples arise  
out of the differences in their occupations.  
Ibn Khaldun

Rapidly gaining in popularity on university campuses across the nation, is the branch of sociology known as the study of work and occupations. The occupational sociologist is concerned with attitudes toward work in general, attitudes of the public at large toward various professions and vocations, and the attitudes of the individual worker toward his job. And if he, the sociologist, is concerned with the work task and physical conditions pertaining to work, it is the social role which is his prime and overriding consideration.

Occupation, Richard Hall defines as "the social role performed by adult members of society that directly and/or indirectly yields social and financial consequences and that constitutes a major focus in the life of an adult."<sup>1</sup> (Hall, Occupations and the Social Structure, pp. 4-5)

William Faulkner, the only modern American novelist to have created an entire county, peopled an imaginary world that is complete in itself (Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study, p. 3), was also concerned with man as a working animal. His is an exhaustive chronicle covering the lives of three generations of families; every race and social class is represented. In these people's lives, work occupies a central place not so much because of the amount of time involved but

because the type of work done determines a man's place in society, his self and social identity. In Faulkner as in the real world, a man is what he is because of what he does for a living.

When an inhabitant of Yoknapatawpha County wants to rise socially, he does so through occupational mobility, when he is engaged in less prestigious employment than his father, this is usually a sign that his family is "losing out" socially. When a man in this make-believe section of the country, through some failure or misfortune, is deprived of his pursuit we see, in the general dissipation of his character, just how much a person's "walk of life" is precisely that.

In the sociology of literature and literature of sociology, either one, I have come across only three attempts to study occupations as portrayed in fiction. Two deal with the image of the professor. David Riesman devotes a few pages to a literary indictment of the academic elite in the novel, "We Happy Few."<sup>3</sup> (Riesman, Individualism Reconsidered, chap. 3) Michael Belok looked at fifty novels involving professors as major characters. He found that they were depicted as unworldly, tired, queer, and an all-round second-rater and the women as even more deviant. He concludes that authors reflect common attitudes of society.<sup>4</sup> (Belok, Journal of Educational Sociology, pp. 404-408) The third profession that has been studied by a sociologist drawing data from literature, is the scientist in science fiction. This is a purely quantitative account showing the proportion of scientists as major characters.<sup>5</sup> (Walter Hirsch, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 63, 1958)

My "socioanalysis," as I have come to call this type of socioliterary endeavor, will necessarily be different from those above. I am not concerned with one profession but with a whole panorama of

professions. Out of 20,000 possibilities for lines of employment, Faulkner includes several hundred. Perforce then, I shall generalize and select a few here and there for exemplification or "dramatic effect" or even humor, as the case may be.

The world of work in Western society is highly complex: so it is in Faulkner. (1) We shall begin our discussion by surveying the occupational network in this man-made and society-replicated kingdom. To determine not only what sort of work people are doing here, but the way they feel about what they and others are doing, will be our initial task. Certain occupational fields will be singled out for a closer examination. (2) A consideration of the author's philosophical orientation toward work (both in his personal view and as expressed by his characters.) (3) Next we shall investigate the interrelationship between occupation and social class, the differential allotments of prestige on the basis of an eight-hours-a-day routine. (4) Finally, the putative connection between a character's personality and his particular line of work will be explored.

The approach will be largely intuitive and even common-sensical at times; in other works we shall not be stopping at each step along the way for systematic verification of some point or points the author has made. This would be to make an adventure in literature unnecessarily tedious. It is the belief here that if Faulkner has failed to present a sound picture of man at work, if the relationships between occupation and social class, occupation and educational level, occupation and personality, for example, do not tie in, then his unrealism should be to some degree self-evident.

## SPECIFIC OCCUPATIONS

Of Faulkner's estimated 15,000 inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha County, 600 (500 whites, 100 Negroes) are singled out by name. Using grouped categories--e.g., farmer, mill worker, etc.--we find that he lists 76 separate occupations. In Ford and Kincaird, Who's Who in Faulkner, 308 characters (using only residents of Yoknapatawpha County) are described in terms of how they earn a living; only about 15 of these are women--the housewife-career is not mentioned per se.

Sociologists have noticed a certain similarity among people who engage in the same sort of work.

It is partly the nature of the work but to a greater extent the imitation of and the adaptation to the standards of the profession which make members of a profession similar to one another.

Mannheim, Systematic Sociology

Similarly, Faulkner notes common tendencies among various types of workers. Let it be hypothesized here that he is also a keen recorder of stereotyped views and generalized attitudes held by members of the public, that his occupational structure is not inconsistent with the real one. First, for fun, we shall look at what the author and his characters had to say about various types of people. Then an outline and analysis of the whole occupational gamut will be provided along with a discussion of Faulkner's personal image of certain styles of work. At times we shall be taking his statements at face value, at times reading between the lines or at least reading only carefully selected lines.

Let us start then, with an assortment of pertinent remarks; the order of presentation is one vaguely approximating the prestige order accepted by sociologists.

1. The unemployed:

Born Maury after his mother's only brother: a handsome flashing swaggering workless bachelor who borrowed money from almost anyone.

2. The bootlegger:

"So I told her that he was busy at a job he had. . . Because I rekkon he does call it work, carrying all them cold little bottles nekkid against his chest."

3. The janitor's face was round, a little flabby, quite dirty, with a dirty stubble.

4. Saw-mill workers:

Some of the other workers were family men and some were bachelors and they were of different ages and they led a catholic varieties, yet on Monday they all came to work with a kind of gravity, almost decorum. . .on Monday morning they came quietly and soberly to work, in clean overalls and clean shirts.

5. The carpenter speaking:

"But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy court-house."

6. The carnival owner:

"I won't have nothing like that in my show. I run a respectable show, with a respectable troupe."

7. Comments on the farmer:

"You think the man that sweats to put into the ground gets a red cent more than a bare living," I says.

And:

"He was up at sunrise, planting things in the ground and watching them grow and tending them. . .and went to bed with grateful muscles and with the sober rhythm of the earth in his body and so to sleep."

8. The county librarian, a mousesized and--colored woman who had never married. . .spent the rest of her life trying to keep Forever Amber in its orderly orderly overlapping avatars and Jurgeon and Tom Jones out of the hands of highschool juniors.

## 9. A justice of the peace:

. . .in a beautifully laundered though collarless white shirt with immaculate starch-gleaming cuffs. . .and steel-framed spectacles, and neat, faintly curling white hair.

10. Some youngish men, townsmen, some of whom Byron knew as clerks and young lawyers and even merchants, who had a generally identical authoritative air, like policemen in disguise.

## 11. On politicians:

"Those grafters in the mayor's office will split among themselves."

And:

"(Will Varner) had shaved notes and foreclosed liens and padded furnish bills and evicted tenants until the way Will Varner went Frenchman's Bend had done already left."

## 12. The professor:

(Januarius Jones) A religio-sentimental orgy in gray tweed, shaping an insincere fleeting articulation of damp clay to an old imperishable desire.

And:

"Like these college professors without a whole pair of socks to their name, telling you how to make a million in ten years."

## 13. Banking:

"My dearest sweetheart

Just a line to let you know that I have gone into business into the banking business making money for you. To give ourselves the position in the world you deserve."

## 14. A lawyer speaking:

"I am happy I was given the privilege of meddling with impunity in other people's affairs without really doing any harm by belonging to the avocation whose acolytes have been absolved in advance for holding justice above truth."

15. He is the District Attorney, a Harvard graduate, a Phi Beta Kappa: a tall, loosejointed man with a constant cobpipe. . .with an untidy mop of irongrey hair. . .His family is old in Jefferson, his ancestors owned slaves there. . .

A statistical comparison (to be taken up elsewhere) of census data for 1930 with Faulkner's unintentional occupational breakdown reveals Faulkner has included too small a percentage of his characters in the agricultural and public service categories. Nevertheless, more of his working people are described as farmers (31) than as members of any other occupational group.

One possible explanation is that there are far more farmers in Faulkner's world than are given the label, "farmer," that the agricultural worker, hardly an exceptional personage in Northern Mississippi, is infrequently designated as such. And, in fact, the country people do dominate (numerically) in Faulkner's novels. Even assuming the worst, that the author is concerned disproportionately with the higher echelon professions, sociologists have been doing the same for years.<sup>6</sup> (Hall, p. 8)

The hierarchy ranges from the low evaluation of unskilled physical labor toward the more prestigious use of skill, through the creative talents, ideas, and the management of men.

Lasswell, Class and Stratum, p. 87.

Faulkner was not unaware of the occupational hierarchy in Mississippi. I mean the ones who were not yet store- and gin-owners and already settled lawyers and doctors, but were only the clerks and bookkeepers in the stores and gins and offices.

The Town, p. 13.

Because Faulkner deals with the plain people as well as the planters, with the shiftless as well as the productive, with the rural as well as the town dweller, and because he provides numerous



representations of each type, it is possible to determine which vocations he held in esteem and which he did not. Some of the results are surprising.

As the reader no doubt is aware, there is a great deal of violence--also decadence and perversity--throughout the novels under discussion. Murder is a common occurrence. As this is not considered a particularly admirable offence, we may go one step further and assume that when a novelist makes a representative from a particular vocation commit a murder, he is indicating a, perhaps unconscious, distaste for that particular line of work.

So who are the murderers in Faulkner? They are soldiers (4), bootleggers (4), preachers (2), lumber men (2), sharecroppers (2), mill employees (2), one ex-prostitute, one squatter. A work of warning about the soldiers: the murders committed by these men often tie in with their chivalric codes and/or their youth. Moreover, 4 lost sheep out of 17 for the military compared to 2 out of 2 for the lumber men is obviously a much smaller proportion. Using such ratios for more accurate results we have: squatters 1/1, lumber men 2/3, preachers 2/5, bootleggers 4/11, soldiers 4/17, ex-prostitutes 1/8, prostitutes, farmers and sharecroppers 2/31.

This would show, I think, a fairly poor image of at least the first five of those trades. Looking next at personality traits, the maids and male servants seem to come off the best. Dilsey, the family maid, superstitious and ignorant, though she be, is the only sensible major character in The Sound and the Fury. These Negro household workers, usually for crumbling white families are portrayed as universally loyal, old-fashioned, and as good surrogate-mothers for their charges.

The doctors are for the most part what E. M. Forster would call "flat" characters. They are merely background figures, never outstanding, never protagonists of the action; lawyers, in contrast, probably because Faulkner was descended from members of the legal profession emerge with "round" personalities. These men are generally cultivated and sensitive but often slightly neurotic. Two are dipsomaniacs, one clubfooted, one a poet, most are lazy.

That Faulkner had little respect for teachers and professors is shown in his presentation of them as singularly ineffectual creatures, failures, especially where romance is concerned. Ministers and preachers come off with even less "panache." For the most part, they are fanatics. The church in America, Faulkner says, was built by people wishing "to be incorrigible and unreconstructable Baptists and Methodists; not to escape from tyranny as they claimed and believed, but to establish one."<sup>7</sup> (The Town, p. 307)

The Mississippi writer admired carpenters and artists for their creativity, but above all he is partial to the farmer. Partly it is because he is living a life in harmony with nature. Ibn Khaldun, the great 14th century social thinker, put the agricultural worker on a pedestal for the same reason. Faulkner's hard-working farmers whether prosperous or not, whether intelligent or not, have tremendous dignity and warmth and self respect. They are most often the martyrs in these novels, two have their barns burned, several are sold worthless ponies by Flem Snopes. If they are inclined at times to seem a little bit naive, this is all a part of the almost automatic trust they have in the passing stranger.

A certain lack of objectivity is apparent when one examines occupational images in this way. The reader cannot deny, however, that Faulkner's range of comprehension about the various professions shows amazing flexibility or that the table which follows yields a fairly apt sociological picture.

TABLE OF THE 76 OCCUPATIONAL GROUPINGS IN FAULKNER

alderman	1	librarian	1
architect	1	lumber business	3
armed forces	17	maid	13
banking (all levels)	9	matron of orphanage	1
barber	2	mayor	3
beggar	1	mechanic	2
blacksmith	4	mill workers	5
boardinghouse supervisor	5	minister	7
workers on boat	3	mortician	1
bootlegger	11	musician	1
bouncer	1	operator (telephone)	1
unspecified businessman	2	pilot	1
carpenter	3	pimp	1
carnival workers	3	planter	5
clerk and storekeeper	11	p. o. clerk	1
cook	3	politician	3
cotton speculator	3	preacher	5
deputy	3	professor	2
dietician	1	prostitute and madam	8
doctor	11	railroad men	4
dressmaker	1	receptionist	1
druggist	1	restaurant owner	2
editor of paper	2	revenue agent	1
electrician	1	salesman	5
engineer	1	sculptor	1
farmer and employee	31	servant (male)	14
FBI agent	1	sheriff and marshall	14
fireman	1	shop and store owners	22
gambler	1	squatter	1
governor	2	slave	6
handyman	1	stable owner	4
horse trader	4	student	2
hunter and trapper	2	teacher	5
jailer	3	trainer of horses	1
janitor	1	waitress	1
judge	4	warden	1
judge's clerk	1	watchman	2
lawyer	8	welfare worker	1

## GENERAL ORIENTATION TOWARD WORK

The Greeks saw work as a curse, the Hebrews as atonement for sin, Calvin as a means for achievement to prove one's worth, Marx as a coerced performance, Freud as an unpleasant duty, but modern sociology as something man both has to but wants to do. Though Faulkner is probably of the latter persuasion, in his writings all these strains are apparent at one time or another.

Some positions are inherently more pleasant than others. This is a statement found in Richard Hall, Occupations and the Social Structure, but it also adequately sums up one of Faulkner's themes. This explains why many of his lower class personalities fret about their hard labor and why some in the middle range are equally dissatisfied. A second basic work theme we shall find here is that man's line of work is intimately bound up with his life. A third and related theme is that no man can tolerate idleness.

Many of the workers in Yoknapatawpha County feel that they are being exploited. A Negro sums up his point of view: "White folks gives nigger money because he knows the first white man comes along with a band going to get it all back, so nigger can go to work for some more."<sup>8</sup> (The Sound and the Fury, p. 35) Mink Snopes philosophizes in prison about his farming life: "He didn't own this land: he referred of course to the renter's or cropper's share of what it made. . .the ground, the dirt which any and every tenant farmer and sharecropper knew to be his sworn foe and mortal enemy--the hard implacable land which wore out his youth and his tools and then his body itself." (The Mansion, pp. 90-91) A working-class character in another novel talks of himself and his wife, in this vein: ". . .and me and Addie slaving and a-slaving." Elsewhere

he remarks, "Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hard-working man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats." (As I Lay Dying, pp. 363 and 414)

Few of such bottom-stratum workers are seen as enjoying their labor. Probably life for them is too much of a struggle to enable them to get much gratification out of the act of working. "And now I got to pay for it, me without a tooth in my head, hoping to get ahead enough so I could get my mouth fixed."<sup>11</sup> (As I Lay Dying, p. 364) As it is put in a book on stratification: "The goal of persons in the lowest class is to survive, to hang on for a few more days or weeks."<sup>12</sup> (Laswell, Class and Stratum, p. 278) At times Faulkner seems to definitely be taking the view that the working man is exploited. In this sense, as Marx informs us, labor is external to the worker, "I.e., it does not belong to his essential being."<sup>13</sup> (Karl Marx Dictionary, p. 6)

But then there is the occasion when the businessman, because he has not progressed as far up the ladder of success as he would have liked, is equally disillusioned. From Jason Compson we get:

"Sure," I says, "I never had time to be (a reproach). I never had time to go to Harvard like Quentin or drink myself into the ground like Father, I had to work." . . . "I know you have to slave your life away for us," she says. "You know if I had my way, you'd have an office of your own to go to and hours that became a Bascomb."

So far it would seem that Faulkner was an advocate of the work-as-a-curse position. Actually, his over-all view as revealed in his personal remarks, his plot construction, and dialogue was just the opposite. Let us start with a statement made by the Mississippi writer in a press interview.

"What else are you going to do?" he says. "You can't drink eight hours a day. Or make love. Work's about the only thing a fellow has to do to keep from being bored."

This same attitude is the predominant one in his books. Work is seen, in short, as serving the latent function of keeping a person in a reasonable frame of mind. If a man is depressed, the routine of labor will cheer him up; if he is working and loses his employment, he will become depressed. When Bayard returns to Jefferson in a heavy frame of mind, the only peace he can experience is during the period that he works on the farm:

Without being aware of the progress of it he had become submerged in a monotony of days, had been snared by rhythm of activities repeated and repeated until his muscles grew so familiar with them as to get his body through days without assistance from him at all. He had been so neatly tricked by earth, that ancient Delilah, that he was not aware that his locks were shorn.

Sartoris, p. 181

An occurrence that takes place more than once in Faulkner's fiction is a man is deprived of his career. In one tragic scene in one of the Snopes' novels, Mink is in a state of misery behind bars.

"Which is all I want," he said. "Jest to get out of here and go back home and farm. That dont seem like a heap to ask."

The Mansion, p. 40

Then there is Hightower, the equally pathetic unemployed minister. Not only has he lost his job, his whole self identity is being crushed. All he can do is "watch himself among faces, always among, enclosed and surrounded by faces."

"I am not in life anymore," he reflects.

Light in August, p. 226

The way Faulkner feels about it is that man desires to be lazy, but that his psychical system as well as public opinion cannot endure

such idleness. In one place there is the view expressed:

"(Providence) enables man to rise and till the soil, so that he might eat. Would he, do you think, arise and labor if he could remain comfortably supine over long?"

Soldier's Pay, pp. 63-64

In another:

"Men can't stand anything," she repeated, "can't even start helling around with no worry or respectability and no limit to all the meanness they can think about wanting to do. Do you think a man could sit day after day and month after month in a house miles from nowhere and spend the time between casualty lists tearing up bedclothes and window curtains. . ."

Sartoris, p. 53

Perhaps the best summary of Faulkner's attitude toward work is his thought on non-work:

Better than the musty offices where the lawyers waited lurking among ghosts of old lusts and lies, or where the doctors waited with sharp knives and sharp drugs, telling man, believing that he should believe, without resorting to printed admonishments, that they labored for that end whose ultimate attainment would leave them with nothing whatever to do.

Light in August, p. 217

#### SOCIAL CLASS DIFFERENCE AND OCCUPATIONAL RANKING

Occupation is probably the most important single determinant of social class in a society where the emphasis has been strong upon work as the central function of existence.

Francis Merrill

A person's social class background brings its effect to bear on the occupational position he is able to attain, just as his occupational position will have consequences for his status in the community. Those from working-class backgrounds, even when the IQ factor is controlled, are likely to have lower motivation levels than those from the middle

and upper classes. (Hall, p. 45) As has previously been mentioned the social-occupational structure ranges from the menial to that involving independent creative thought and decision-making.

Wage-workers in the factory and on the farms are on the propertyless bottom of the occupational structure, depending upon the equipment owned by others, earning wages for the time they spend at work.

C. W. Mills, Power, Politics, and People, p. 308

Faulkner was keenly aware of such a ranking order and of the social nuances separating one vocation from the next higher up as well as the considerable cleavage among the various situs groupings.

One's social class background is not without its consequences in providing the opportunity and inculcating the spirit of occupational success. The story of low-born Flem Snopes is recorded as follows:

Because Colonel Sartoris had been born into money and respectability too, and Manfred de Spain had been born into respectability at least even if he had made a heap of the money since. But he, Flem Snopes had had to earn both of them, snatch and scrabble both of them out of the hard enduring resisting rock.

The Mansion, p. 153

A woman's chance to achieve a high position through marriage is likewise seen as dependent on occupational background of the parents.

Complains Rosa Coldfield:

"Had I been the daughter of a wealthy planter I could have married almost anyone but being the daughter merely of a small store-keeper, I could even afford to accept flowers from almost no one."

Absolam, Absolam!, p. 169

Within the upper class there is strong pride in high occupational achievement. This was how after all the new settlers in the Deep South became aristocrats in the first place, because of their success in fulfilling a role. One of the Compson adolescents in recognition of



his mother's irregular behavior asks:

. . .do you think so because one of our fore-  
fathers was a governor and three were generals and  
mothers weren't. . .

The Sound and the Fury, p. 121

Jason, from the same family brags:

I says my people owned slaves here when you all  
were little shirt tail country stores and farming  
land no nigger would look at on shares.

Ibid., p. 256

The irony here is that Jason has fallen from his family's profes-  
sional level through a lack of education and therefore he has not only  
fallen socially but has slid into the same occupational category as  
the Snopeses generations back. His mother apologizes:

"I know you haven't had the chance the others had,  
that you've had to bury yourself in a little coun-  
try store. . ."

Ibid., p. 239

People in Faulkner like their flesh counterparts look down on the  
serving vocations. Mrs. Compson tells her daughters:

"All our women have prided themselves on their car-  
riage. Do you want to look like a washer woman."

Ibid., p. 82

A face social scientists rarely mention but the truth of which  
would hardly be denied is the relationship between IQ and occupation and  
therefore social status. One of Faulkner's working class characters  
describes a friend as condemned to a menial position by means of a men-  
tal handicap.

". . .his brain it's like a piece of machinery, it  
won't stand a whole lot of racking. It's best when  
it runs along the same, doing the days' work and  
not no one part used no more than needful."

As I Lay Dying, p. 389

Faulkner, in university lectures, defined fun and work in the same  
way, in terms of productivity. Accordingly, he seems to favor the task

of an artist and (non-tenant) farmers over any other--he often described himself as a farmer who wrote on the side. Here he describes the satisfaction in creativity.

I think that anyone, the painter, the musician, the writer, works in a kind of insane fury. He is demon-driven. He can get up feeling rotten, with a hangover, or with actual pain, and if he gets to work, the first thing he knows he don't remember that pain, that hangover--he's too busy.

Faulkner in the University, p. 194

As a consequence, in his writings there is always a feeling of pity for the underdogs who have so little freedom in their employment. Looking back to the slave days, one character describes the situation:

". . .where a certain few men not only had the power of life and death and barter and sale over others, but they had living human men to perform the endless repetitive offices. . ."

Absalom, Absalom!, p. 220

Jason is presented as filling one of the middle occupations. Though he is not in what he considers a satisfactory field of work, at least it is in the white collar classification. This worker tries to convince himself that his line of work is not getting him down. Here is where Faulkner shows he is observant of the nuances warding off one position from another.

I may not be sitting with my feet on a mahogany desk but I am being paid for what I do inside this building and if I can manage to live a civilized life outside of it I'll go where I can. I can stand on my own feet.

The Sound and the Fury, p. 229

Faulkner was naturally aware of the differences, the less subtle differences, between whole categories of work. The inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha County are divided one from the other on a socio-occupational basis.

"But then I'm a farming man and you're a lawing man."

Intruder in the Dust, p. 245

A great deal of bitterness is expressed by those who labor not for themselves but for another. Sometimes the resentment is of the employer or employer-class, sometimes it is against the nature of the work itself. We saw how the bottom stratum felt they were being exploited by those over them. A continuation of Mink Snopes' prison reflection is not out of order here.

Now. . .he had suddenly discovered something. People of his kind never had owned even temporarily the land which they believed they had rented between one New Year's and the next one. It was the land itself which owned them, and not just from a planting to its harvest but in perpetuity; not the owner, the landlord who evacuated them from one worthless rental in November, onto the public roads to seek desperately another similar worthless one two miles or ten miles or two counties or ten counties away before time to seed the next crop in March, but the land.

The Mansion, p. 91

Vance Packard, in his synopsis of sociological studies of stratification, makes the point again and again that the prestige rank of the breadwinner's occupation, in turn, as we have seen, plays a major part in placing his family in the social-class system.<sup>13</sup> (Status Seekers, chap. 7) That sociology and art may say the same things has been, I think, especially evident in this discussion on the relationship between class and occupation.

#### PERSONALITY AND OCCUPATIONAL POSITION

And a man that earns his bread in a glue factory must get some sort of pleasure smelling cattle hooves or he'd change his job.

Mosquitoes, p. 321

Sociologists have made little or no attempt to relate personality characteristics to career positions. And yet it is a fact of which they are not altogether unaware. Gross notes that personality is related to the occupation chosen and that the occupation, in turn, further molds the personality.<sup>16</sup> (Gross, Work and Society, p. 211) Another study states that knowledge of what a person does "provides a handy indicator of where a person fits vis a vis one's self."<sup>17</sup> (Hall, p. 259) Francis Merrill provides an excellent analysis of personality traits of the occupationally mobile, which will be taken up later. For a fuller elaboration on this and other points not provided by the sociologist, let us turn to the insights of a first rate novelist.

What I want to do here is to present two brief character portraits, one of a socially rising person, Flem Snopes of lowly birth, the other of a socially falling person of upper-class origin, Jason Compson. In both instances the relationship between occupation and personality can be seen as a striking one.

Francis Merrill describes the downwardly mobile as one who is more conservative in many respects than the one who keeps his status, that he is inclined to desperately hold on to the socio-economic system in fear of change.<sup>18</sup> (Merrill, Society and Culture, p. 183) This is a perfect description of Jason Compson.

As a youth his mother sent him into business not to Harvard with his brother. When a planned banking career fell through, (because of the promiscuity of his sister), he became a clerk in a country store. This is what he is condescendingly doing when we meet him in The Sound and the Fury.

Jason is a man obsessed by money. At his father's funeral, he is preoccupied with assessing how much the flowers would have cost. Of his niece and paychecks from her mother it is said,

Neither of them had had entity or individuality for him for ten years; together they merely symbolized the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he even got it.

Merrill has said that social failure may cause neurosis. Jason has been suffering from such failure all his life not of his own doing but ultimately as a result of the Civil War which destroyed the system in which the aristocrat's status was based. For this reason he tries to preserve the present with a hysteria and even tries to make the present into the past. Moreover, he is paranoid; he sees the world through jaundiced spectacles. Faulkner does not describe this unlovable character; rather he lets him describe himself:

(speaking to a Negro) "Saturday wouldn't mean nothing to you, either," I says, "if it depended on me to pay you wages."

And:

"What this country needs is white labor. Let these damn trifling niggers starve for a couple of year, then they'd see what a soft thing they have."

The Sound and the Fury, p. 208

Articles in psychological journals will sometimes point up the fact that paranoid people tend to identify with the underdog. This is the true explanation for what may seem like sympathy here for the farmer.

"Do you think the farmer gets anything out of it except a red neck and a hump in his back? You think the man that sweats to put into the ground gets a red cent more than a bare living," I says. "Let me make a big crop and it won't be worth picking; let him make a small crop and he won't have enough to gin. And what for? so a bunch of damn eastern jews. . ."

The Sound and the Fury, p. 209

The quote above indicates how an individual's personality affects his perception of others' careers. The effect is brought to bear on his own earning experience.

I don't see how a city no bigger than New York can hold enough people to take the money away from us country suckers. Work like hell all day send them stock brokers your money and get a little piece of paper back.

Ibid., p. 251

Perpetually he complains of his work. Here we see this plus his attitude toward leisure.

Ten hours a day to support a kitchen full of niggers in the style they're accustomed to and send them to the show with every other nigger in the country.

Ibid., p. 256

Another comment on leisure:

Like I say the only place for them (Negroes) is in the field, where they'd have to work from sunup to sundown. They cant stand prosperity or an easy job.

Ibid., p. 267

In sum, then, we have witnessed an interrelationship between Jason's personality and his work situation. Because he has been brought up to fill a high status socio-economic occupational role in society but has been deprived of the place he would have felt was rightfully his, he has become angry, ruthless and obnoxiously "superior." Jason is the exemplar of the man declassé, his own sense of failure projected on to the world around him.

Flem Snopes moves forward so fast, it is hard to classify him with any one occupational group. He is the archcapitalist and materialist like Jason, his upper class equivalent. Faulkner has appointed Flem as much the personification of the socially mobile that he is not a whole man at all but uncomplex, inhuman. He is an archetype, not an

individual, an approach the author used not out of incompetence but because he wished to say something about the social order as a definite and recognizable type.

Francis Merrill was cognizant of the personality hazards accruing from a singular ambition.

Whether successful or not in their drive for status, many such persons are unpleasant spouses, inadequate parents, and unsatisfactory friends. In their efforts to get ahead. . . they may become neurotic, alcoholic, or overly aggressive.

Merrill, Society and Culture, p. 323

Thomas's fourth wish was the desire for recognition. As a young man we see Flem trying to quench such a craving for a position of influence and prestige in the town of Jefferson. Considering how the "noblesse" have been born into wealth and position, he decides that he will overcompensate and surpass even them.

So the house (that) the folks owning the money would see Manfred de Spain walk into every evening. . . wouldn't be enough for Flem Snopes.

The Mansion, p. 153

Soon, our hero has turned banker. He casts aside his cocoon moth-like and suits his personality to the new rung in the ladder. The town says

"But this time we didn't know him. He still wore the little bow tie and his jaw was still pulsing faintly and steadily, but now he wore a hat, a new one of the broad black felt kind which country preachers and politicians wore."

Ibid., p. 138

Eventually, Flem becomes bank president. Although the way along his journey, he is a man alone, resented by the town, driven by an obsessive passion to boost his ego by a tangible success. His sexual impotency is the most likely explanation for his relentless drive to the top.

Flem Snopes, in his rise to prominence had one problem that Jason did not, would never have. He had no past, no background and, accordingly, he would never be acceptable in upper class circles. Ratliff was the town's authority on this man who was considered an upstart, a nouveau riche:

"What?" I said. "What is it he's got to have?"  
 "Respectability," Ratliff said.  
 "Respectability?"  
 "That's it. . .when it's jest money and power a man wants, there is usually some place where he will stop; there's always one thing at least ever--every may wont do for jest money. But when it's respectability he finds out he wants and has got to have, there ain't nothing he wont do to get it and then keep it."

The Town, p. 259

Becoming president of the bank is described by Ratliff as part of the battle of gaining respectability. And furniture dealers encourage him to buy antiques for the same purpose.

And Flem said, "Why?" and the man said, "For background. Your grandfather." and Flem said, "I had a grandfather because everybody had, I don't know who he was but I know that whoever he was he never owned enough furniture for a room, let alone a house."

Ibid., p. 222

What this all goes to show is that occupation and social mobility, though closely related, are not exactly identical. In a society where class consciousness predominates, marginality is the almost inescapable fate of the upwardly mobile person.<sup>19</sup> (Turner, The Social Context of Ambition, p. 109) A person needs to be born into the class of gentlemen to learn all the subtleties of their behavior.<sup>20</sup> (Kahl, The American Class Structure, p. 189) Flem Snopes is a man suffering from status incongruity. Nevertheless, he has accomplished at the end of the Snopes Trilogy about what he had originally set out to do; he has become a big



man, a force to be reckoned with in the community.

Jason Compson exemplifies the interrelationship between personality structure and the sense of occupational failure; Flem Snopes is the incarnation of those very traits--toughness, singularity of purpose, ruthlessness--which enable a person to win out in a harsh struggle for ascendancy but which would tend to handicap him in the social running. Thus we have seen in one case how occupational position (or lack of position) can shape the personality, and in the other, how personality can decide the occupational position.

Sociologists of work make a big mistake in neglecting the data available in contemporary novels. When a social scientist is studying a particular line of work, for instance, how well he could supplement his empirical findings with images of that particular profession in popular literature. For such works not only reflect society's attitudes toward an occupation but they reinforce those attitudes. The study of the minister would do well to look at the role of Elmer Gantry, the study on the real estate agent to consider Babbitt and the study on the traveling salesman to take notes from Death of a Salesman. Moreover, in the literary world is a treasure chest of ideas for scientific validation (as of professional images, roles, etc.).

In this paper, we have considered some of the predominant images of various lines of work as well as some of the major philosophical orientations to the fact of work itself. The influence of a man's occupational role upon his social class standing and even personality traits was also investigated. The data were not gathered, however, from the census bureau or the NORC survey or personal interviews. Instead, they were obtained from the world of fiction. And that is the only difference.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Richard Hall, Occupations and the Social Structure. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969, pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>Irving Howe, William Faulkner, A Critical Study. N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1962, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>David Riesman, Individualism Reconsidered. N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954, chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Belok, "Social Attitudes toward the Professor in Novels," Journal of Educational Sociology, Vol. 34, 1961, pp. 404-408.

<sup>5</sup>Walter Hirsch, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 63, 1958.

<sup>6</sup>Hall, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>William Faulkner, The Town. N.Y.: Random House, 1957, p. 307.

<sup>8</sup>William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury. N.Y.: Cape and Smith, 1929, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup>William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying. N.Y.: Cape and Smith, 1930, pp. 363-414.

<sup>10</sup>William Faulkner, The Mansion. N.Y.: Random House, 1959, pp. 90-91.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Laswell, Class and Stratum. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965, p. 278.

<sup>13</sup>Stockhammer, ed., Karl Marx Dictionary. N.Y.: Philosophy Library, 1965, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>Hall, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>15</sup>Vance Packard, Status Seekers. N.Y.: Pocket Books, Inc., chapter 7.

<sup>16</sup>Edward Gross, Work and Society. N.Y.: Thomas Crowell Co., 1958, p. 211.

<sup>17</sup>Hall, op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>18</sup>Francis Merrill, Society and Culture. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 183.

<sup>19</sup>Ralph Turner, The Social Context of Ambition. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1964, p. 109.

<sup>20</sup>Joseph Kahl, The American Class Structure. N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961, p. 189.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Though all things differ, all agree.  
Alexander Pope

Sociology has been defined as a study the purpose of which is to understand people's thoughts and actions in terms of a systematic knowledge of social behavior. The extent that the author in question has pursued and approximated sociological reality and that he has understood and shared that understanding of man as a social and cultural product, to that extent the validity of William Faulkner's insight is established.

There are many ways of knowing things and many perspectives from which social phenomena can be viewed. Faulkner presents us with one such way, the hypothesizing sociologist with another. When these perspectives coincide then, they lend validity to each other. We want to explore two fundamental issues here, to discover (1) what the sociologist can learn about the South from William Faulkner, and (2) what the sociologist can learn about the South that is sociological?

What sort of understanding does William Faulkner bring to the South? The theme of Absolam, Absolam! and one of the author's recurrent themes is that the South was erected on a defective structure--slavery--and that its plantation economy, dependent as it was on absolute control of masses of labor, was thereby doomed. The modern South in Faulkner is explained in terms of its past history, in its inability to come to terms with

necessary social change. The aristocratic, agrarian tradition in the South we see as consistently unwilling to accept the equalitarian ideology of the North. All of Faulkner's major characters are presented as deeply affected in one way or another by the battles of the past "of the war and its heritage of suffering and injustice and sorrow."

In "The Snopes Trilogy" and The Sound and the Fury one learns of the strong boundaries of class stratification in the small town South, how a man may make remarkable occupational success and still not be accepted socially by the old families and how the old families though reduced to penury and low-prestige jobs still carry with them a strong sense of lineal superiority. ("I says my people owned slaves here when you all were running little shirt tail country stores and farming land no nigger would look at on shares.")

On the question of race relations, the sociologist reader of Faulkner is confirmed in his knowledge of the paternalistic Southern tradition. Negroes are whipped and lynched when they get out of line and loved and relied upon when they do not. Miscegenation is seen as holding a particular preoccupation for all white Southerners. In Absolam, Absolam! a son is disclaimed because of discovered Negro blood in his mother's line.

In harmony with the descriptions of journalists, historians, and sociologists, then, the South is depicted in William Faulkner as a region strong on tradition in which the upper class is clinging frantically to its historic or believed historic way of life, strong on Southern identity and sense of the romantic past, strong on divisions of caste and class and of occupational role as manifestation of class.

Critics over the years have been baffled by Faulkner. Many do not appreciate him, and some who appreciate still do not understand him. This is in part because they do not see Faulkner as sociologist: as poet, classical scholar, psychologist, but not as sociologist. In other words, they look for the concrete rather than the abstract, and the gist of Faulkner is in the abstractions which underly his characters.

Faulkner's characters cannot be understood apart from their Southern heritage. Joe Christmas in Light in August is the marginal man, the man who has been so shaped by his society as to be obsessed with race and his racial background. Jason Compson of The Sound and the Fury is authoritarian and bigoted and concerned with time to the point of chronic paranoia--he and his family represent the Southerner's concern with the past. To cite a final example, the reason Quentin Compson, the boy, commits suicide and Quentin Compson, the girl, runs off with a lower class thief is because the burden of the past is too heavy for them.

What can the sociologist learn about the South that is sociological? In a close study of Southern people and mores the sociologist can come to grasp to what extent man is socialized by his environment. The notion of marginality is particularly relevant to an understanding of the South. The South is a marginal society within a larger culture; it is the land of planters and small farmers in contrast to the commercial and industrial activity of the North, an activity that has steadily been moving southward since the turn of the century. The Gemeinschaft-like emphasis on past heritage, communal feelings, and a fixed social order is struggling with the conflicting demands of the Gesellschaftish trends of modern society. The South is marginal to the whole culture in the same way that Joe Christmas is marginal to the majority group.

What we learn in studying the South in Faulkner or elsewhere is that man is molded by his culture, that he is in it and of it, and though he may question some of his culture's values, he will not transcend the regional ideology. For this reason, there is little in Faulkner's writing that is idiosyncratic or, given the cultural milieu, improbable.

When he is talking of Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner is talking of the Southern County and of political and normative boundaries generally. When he is talking of Dilsey or of Lucas Beauchamp, he is talking of the Negro and of minority group membership generally. In the same vein, his adolescent is all adolescents, his social climber all social climbers, his aristocrat all aristocrats. Because they are not just personalities but prototypes, they are given as being much alike. For the same reason, behavior that is ostensibly pathological is not pathological because it is normatively regulated in accord with a particular status or pattern of status inconsistency. The characters are to be taken on a symbolic level; they represent types within a particular social structure, so that the norms inherent in the social structure are acted-out by them. Faulkner's characters become problems personified.

A perusal of the writings of Faulkner shows his ideas and commentaries to be sociologically consistent. The sociological observations of the Mississippi author are united in an integrated system. The basis for Faulkner's theoretical system is this: man is a group product shaped in the mores of his culture. ("The past is never dead; it's not even past.") A product of such socialization is seen as having strong views on social class, race, region, and sex. In the

comprehensive work of William Faulkner, the parts fit into the whole. Actors are seen in each case as echoing the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the culture, and the culture here is the South.

Not only is Faulkner's plot sociological, not only are his characters archetypal members of the human race, his town a microcosm for the human community, but one may single out the novelist's equivalent of such sociological concepts as "the looking-glass self," "generalized other," and "marginal man" in his world.

Was Faulkner, then, a sociologist? William Faulkner described himself as a farmer; he was known as a novelist. He was also, in a sense, a sociologist. His people are ideal-constructs; Yoknapatawpha County his laboratory ("William Faulkner sole owner and proprietor"); the actual persons he had known and the stories they handed down, the data; the plot and character development, his tools; verbal probing, interpreting and reinterpreting, his method.

There has been no attempt here to determine whether his ideas antedated or followed those of social scientists; it is the quality of the thought and the choice and handling of subject matter rather than the timing which is important.

The evidence indicates that the Mississippi author hit upon his ideas independently, that he did not have much familiarity with traditional sociological thinking. The fact that he mentions the word, sociology, once in one of his novels and a couple of times in interviews shows an awareness notion that the field exists. In light of what has been said, Faulkner's expertise is best regarded as independent duplication of the professional.



The best of these novels may be regarded as classics of literary sociology. Throughout our study of Faulkner's work we have seen many things, the most basic of which is the relationship of science and art. That fiction is not less serious than science nor less important has been a major underlying contention of this study. While introducing the reader to some of the seemingly bizaar residents of the seemingly mythical county and to their peculiar folkways, the case has been presented that their creator was endowed with the facility of sociologist. To close, a statement from William Faulkner on the final purpose of his work:

I was trying to talk about people, using the only tool I knew, which was the county that I knew.  
NO, I WASN'T TRYING TO--WASN'T WRITING SOCIOLOGY  
AT ALL. (Capitals mine.) I was trying to write  
about people. . . .

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